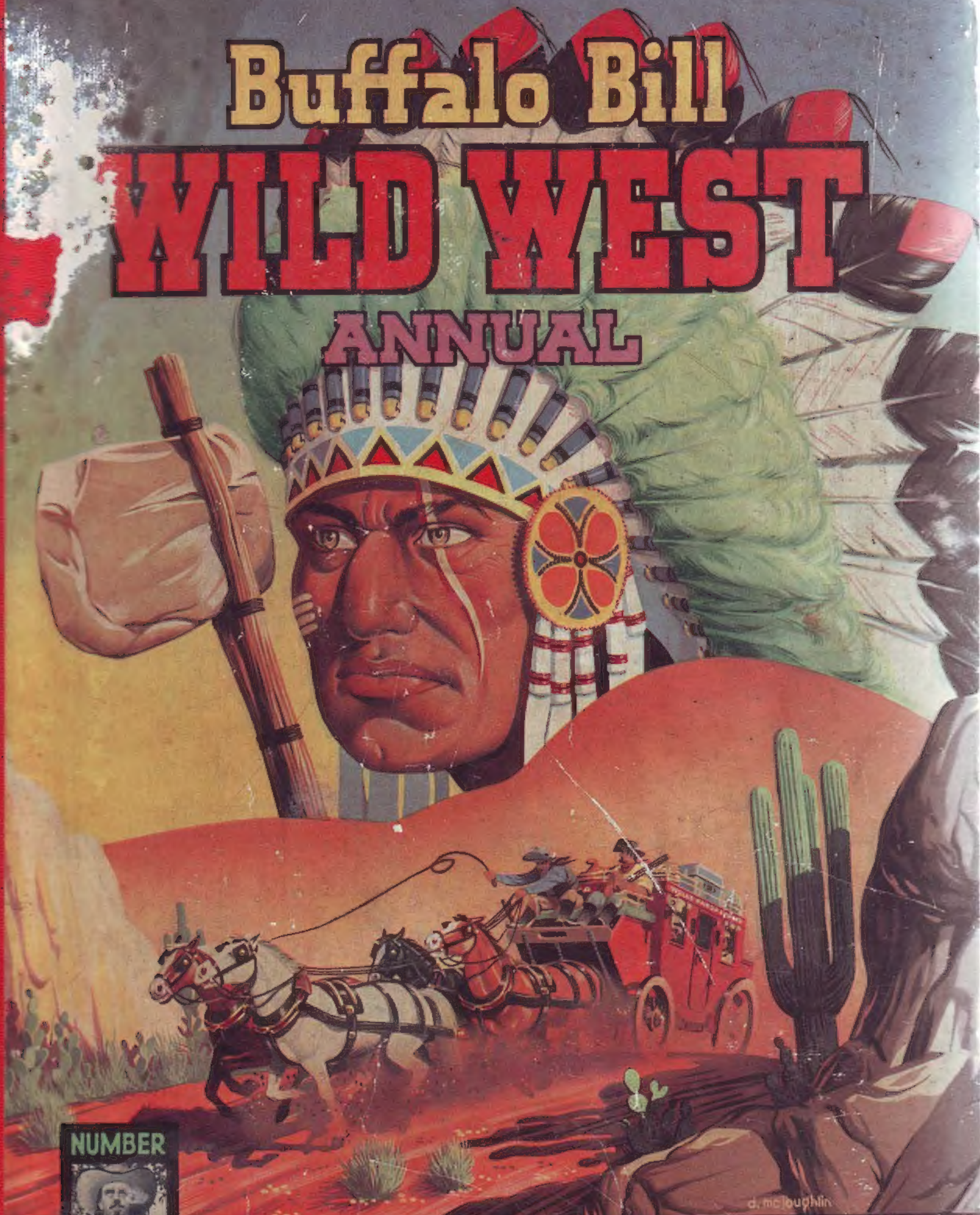
Buffalo Bill
WILD WEST
ANNUAL



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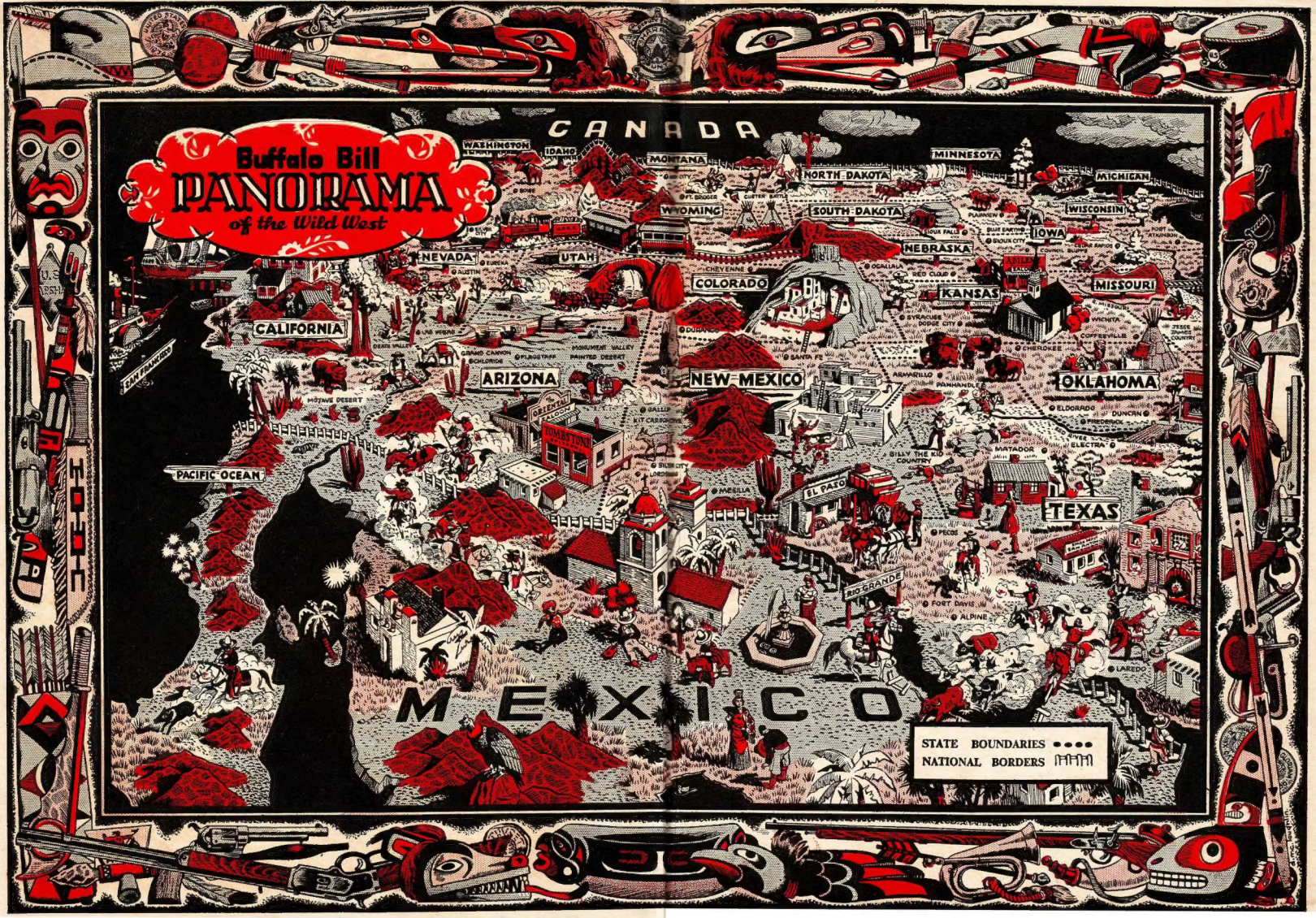
Buffalo Bill
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Buffalo Bill
WILD WEST
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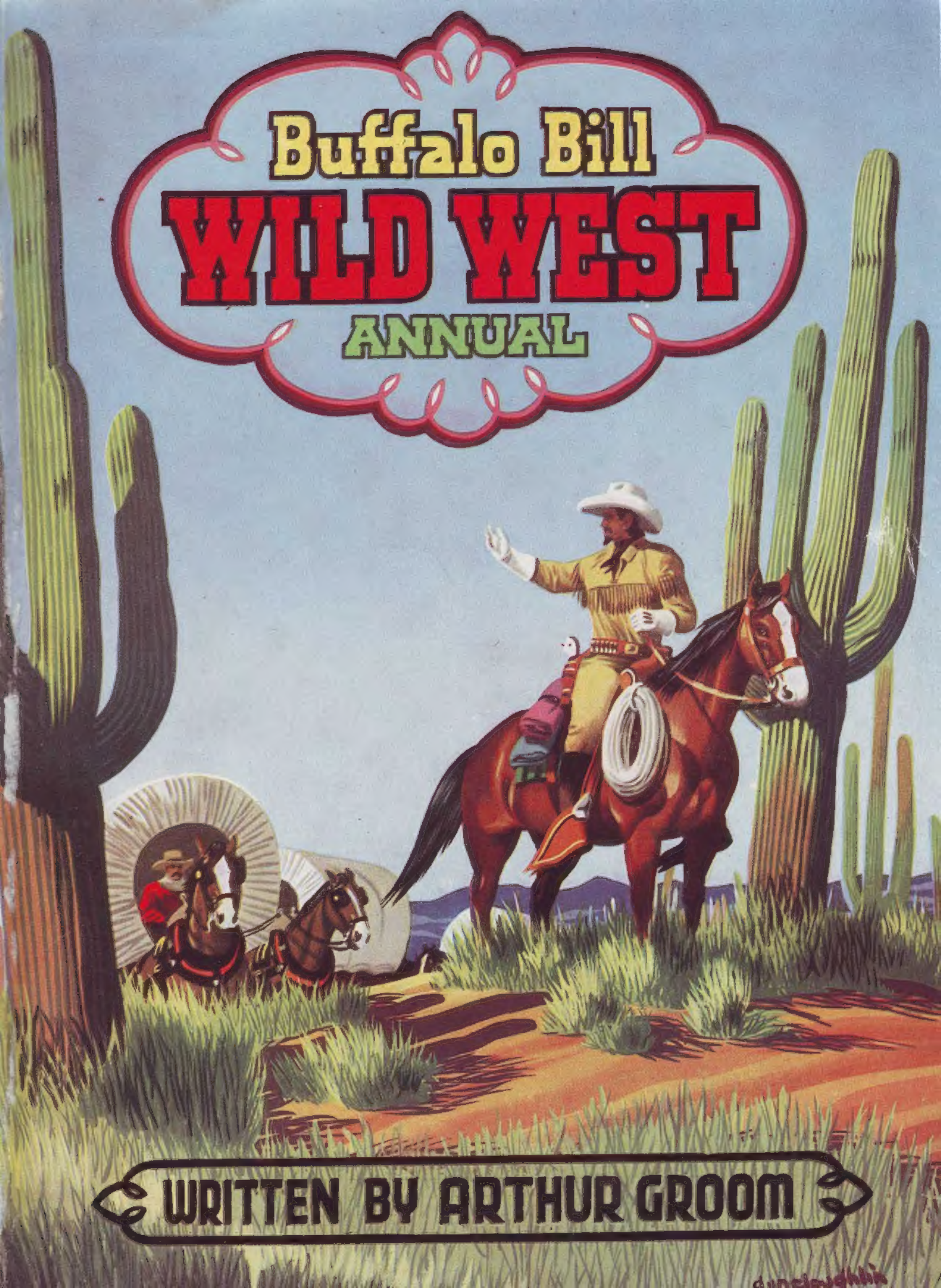

WRITTEN BY ARTHUR GROOM

CHEYENNE DOG SOLDIER

Buffalo Bill

WILD WEST ANNUAL

With Illustrations

by

DENIS McLOUGHLIN

First Published, 1952

PRINTED AND BOUND BY
HAZELL WATSON AND VINEY LTD
AYLESBURY AND LONDON
FOR T. V. BOARDMAN AND CO LTD
14 COCKSPUR STREET, LONDON, S.W.1

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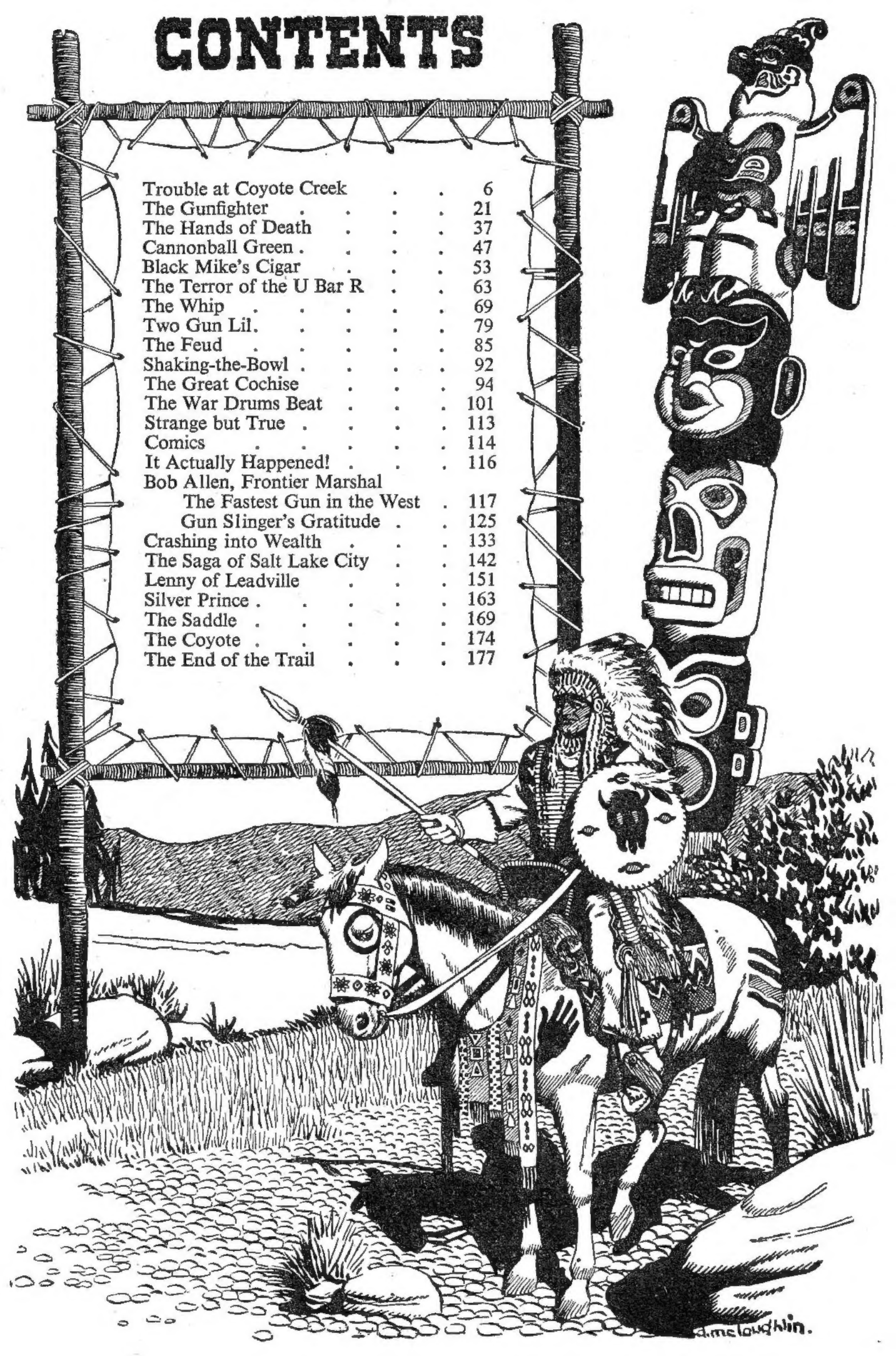

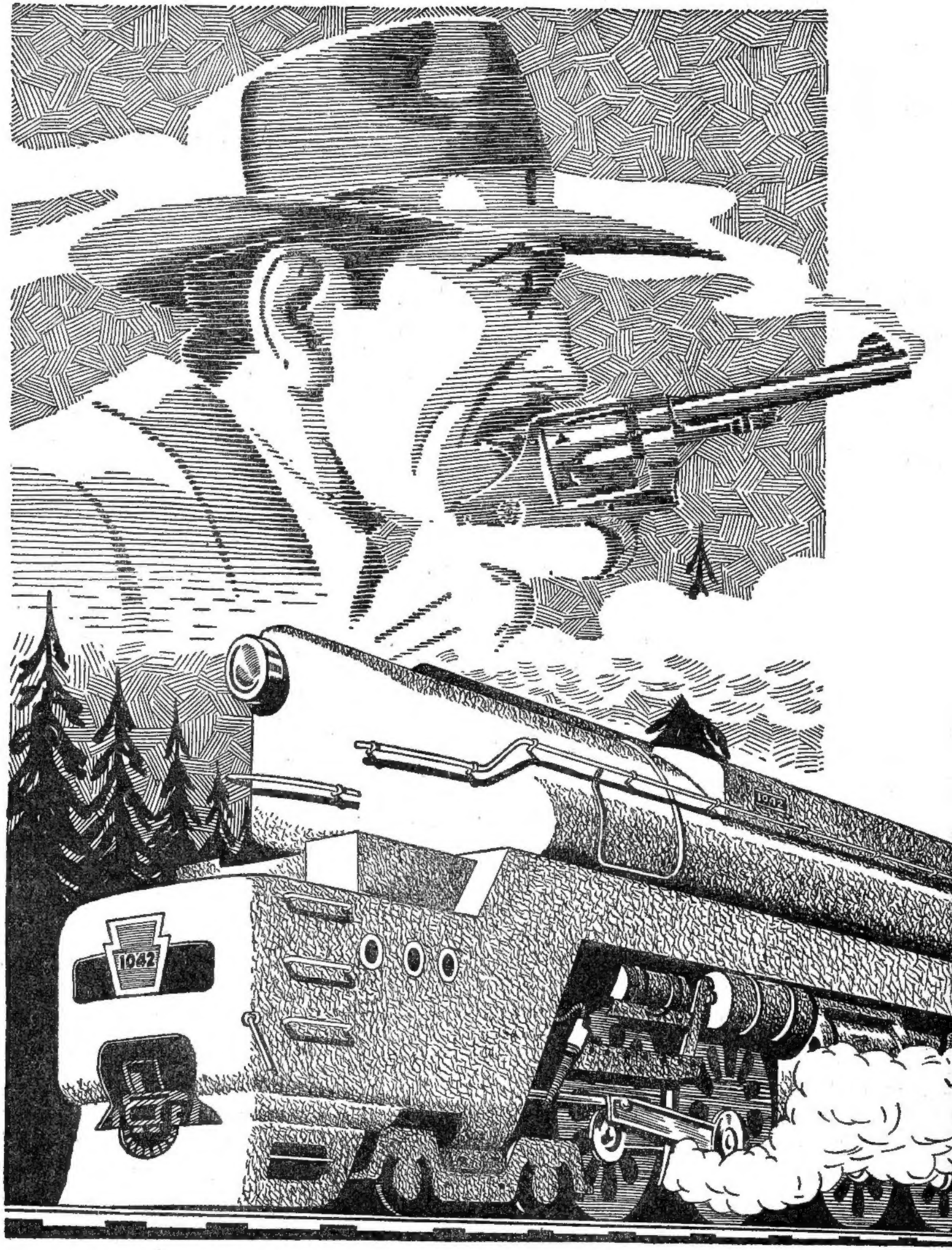
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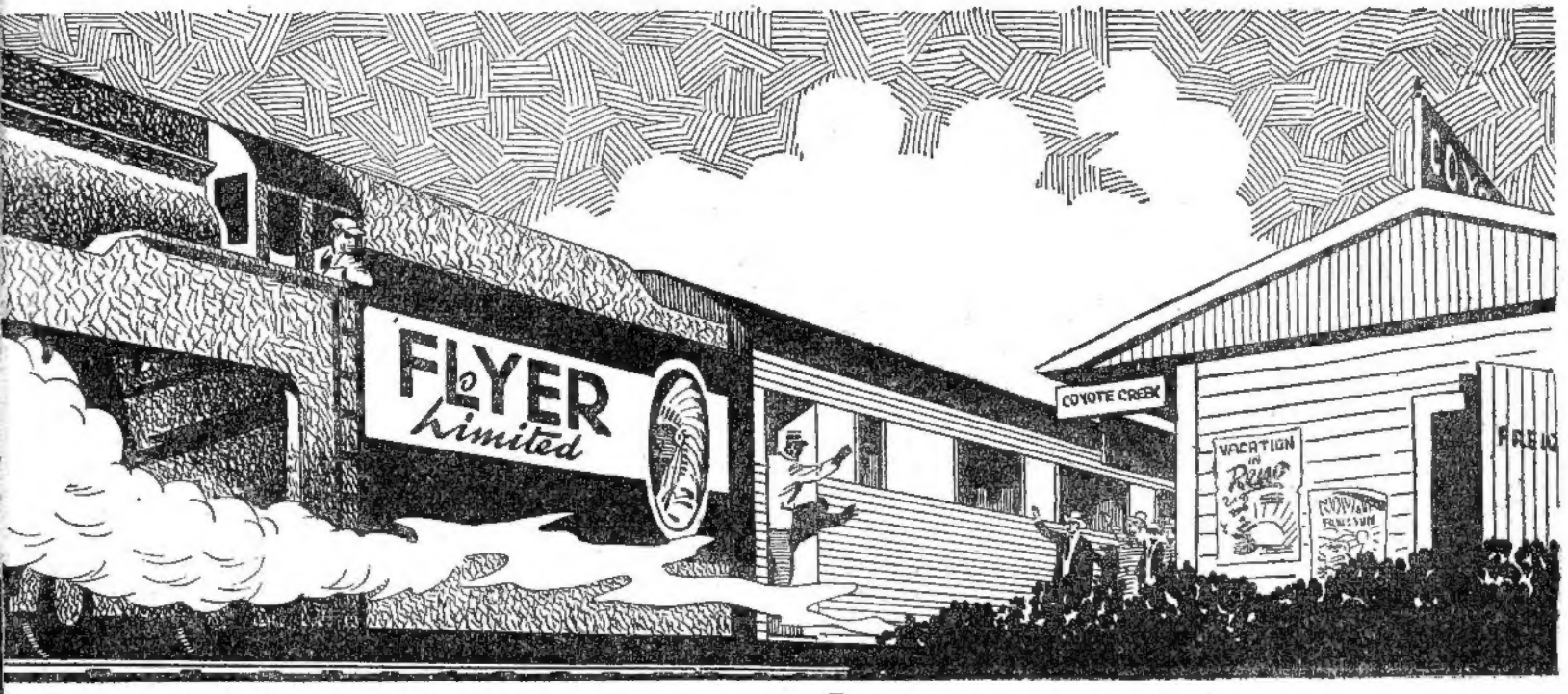
TROUBLE at Coyote Creek

HOOOOOOO-HOOOOOO! Hoooooo-Hooooooo!"

Her siren echoing through the dusk, the southbound "Flyer" Limited thundered through a desert village, clattered over some points that marked a siding, slammed its way across a short iron bridge, slowed a little to take a wide, sweeping curve and then, for a mile or two, punched its way into the very heart of the setting sun before curving due south once more, deeper and deeper into the vastness of the northern Nevada desert.

"We nearly there?" asked Dick Barrington as he dangled his legs over the end of the Pullman seat, seeking through sheer weariness a change of position. "Was that Bistow we went through a mile or so back?"

"Didn't see!" came Tom Hall's reply, as he lolled over a spread-out map on the opposite seat. "The porter will bring our bags, anyway——" He broke off and began to re-fold the map in haste as the brake-shoes took hold of the wheels and the "Flyer" began to slow down in real earnest. "This must be it!" he shouted above the renewed scream of that owl-like locomotive siren. "Hey, Harry!" He nudged the third member of the trio. "Wake up, you lazy beggar! Stick a pin in him or something, Dick!"



But there was no need for that. Harry Dalby rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and the three Colden College friends, travelling in the Western States of America for the fourth time, but this time entirely on their own in the normal way, hastily gathered up their things, tipped the grinning porter as he appeared with their bags and, almost before they knew what was going on, had been dropped off the train at Coyote Creek. The Limited hooted dismally, there was a hiss of steam, the spinning of wheels trying to get a grip on the rails and then, with clouds of smoke pouring from its stack, the locomotive got under way again and the train puffed out of sight round a curve in the track.

"Gosh!" Dick Barrington squatted on a bag and looked about him in the half-light. "Where's the station?"

Tom Hall grinned. "If there was a station," he remarked, "they'd call it a depot, anyway." He dived into a pocket and found some gum. "Humph!" he mused, jaws champing. "One large water-tank, a siding, some cattle trucks——"

"And cattle!" put in Harry Dalby, as the three heard a confused medley of sounds that could only have come from disturbed cattle. "Look!" He pointed towards some white-painted railroad corrals. "There's someone over there. Come on!" And he it was who led the way towards several parked trucks standing near the cattle corrals.

Bang!

The shot came, literally, out of the blue. It whammed its way, like a gigantic bee, between Dick and Tom and then, ricocheting from a stout post, went whining off into nowhere. It was followed by a positive burst of gunfire as the three boys flung themselves to the ground and stayed there, heads well down and hearts pounding like miniature sledgehammers.

"You chaps all right?" Dick's voice sounded muffled and was tight with anxiety.

"Y-yes——" slowly from Harry Dalby. "But what's going on?"

"Tell you later," came the reply. "When I give the word, make for that old shed to our left. Ready?" He was obviously counting to himself. "*Now!*"

The three boys who, with their strange ghostly friend Gordon Gregory, had so often gone back into the past to meet and go adventuring with the great figures of the Wild and Woolly West, sprang to their feet and, scattering, raced for the shelter of the old shed that Dick had indicated.

Crash! Crash!

Two shots from their unseen and unknown assailants narrowly missed them, one chipping off a long splinter from a corner of the shed a split second after Harry Dalby had gained its shelter. It was Dick who spoke first, as the three of them crouched down and listened to hoarse shouts coming out of the rapidly fading light. "Who can they be, Tom?" he hissed in his friend's ear. "Gosh! I didn't expect this. Where's Mr. Billman's foreman, anyway? The letter distinctly said that there'd be someone to meet us. What ARE we going to do?"

"Come out of there!" roared a voice. "Come out, or you won't have long to live."

Dick motioned his friends to remain silent.

"Get them trucks loaded," went on the same voice, now obviously talking to his buddies. "We ain't got all the durned night to clear these corrals. We'll soon winkle them fellers out o' there."

Someone else grunted and the noises made by disturbed steers, just settling down for the night in the corrals, were renewed as the rustlers—for they could be nothing else—went on with their task of loading the trucks.

Bang! Bang!

Two more shots rang out as Tom Hall cautiously put his new Stetson round the angle of the shed. Two neat holes appeared in the crown and the owner of the hat looked unhappy. "Twenty dollars gone west!" he grumbled.

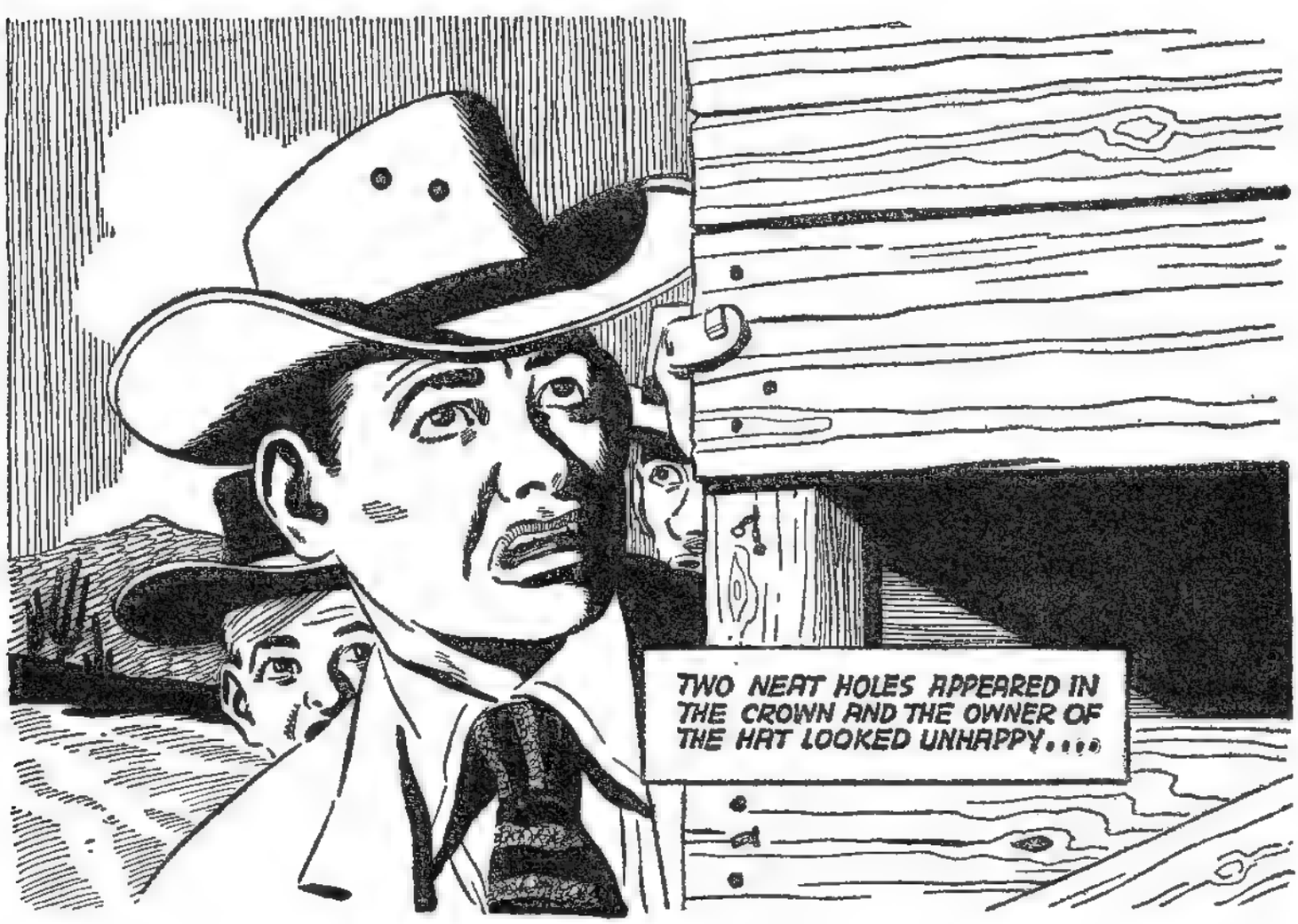
"More fool you," answered Dick. "Listen, chaps. We can't stay here." He looked behind him. "That chap is right, he will soon winkle us out if we stay where we are. Look"—he jerked his head—"we'll have to get across the track and down that banking. They don't know we're not armed and won't dare come out into the open if we can get there."

"I'm with you!" commented Harry.

"Same here!" This from Tom.

"O.K." Dick Barrington, usually the leader of the trio of the most amazing adventurers in the world, began to crawl backwards. "Scatter as we did before and don't run straight. Drop to the ground every twenty yards or so and do the trip in short bursts. We stand a better chance of getting there that way. Ready?"

The other two nodded, faces chalk-white in the evening light. Frankly—and Dick would have been the first to admit it—they had never been so scared in their lives. It was one thing to face dangers—and what terrible dangers they had faced with Gordon Gregory with them—in another period of history and with six-guns or Winchester repeaters to use in self-defence, but it was quite another thing to be under fire from a bunch of no-good hoodlums rustling cattle from railroad corrals in the wilderness that was still modern Nevada. Bound for the JB ranch, that lay some ten miles south of the Coyote Creek stop-off, to stay with a friend of Dick's father, they had expected something quite different. They had fully expected to be mildly bored but, as they



faced that desperate dash for the shelter of the banked-up railroad track, they found themselves wishing things hadn't proved so exciting.

"Go!" hissed Dick at last.

Instantly, as they had done before to reach the shed, Tom, Dick and Harry (known at Colden College, England, as T., D. and H.) scattered and, bent almost double, scrambled crabwise and in zigzag fashion out into the open. Every few yards they dropped to the ground and were still, and it would have taken a Wild Bill Hickok or Buffalo Bill himself to have been sure of registering a hit. Nevertheless, those hidden gunmen banged away with rifles and six-guns, and once Tom Hall felt a ·45 slug ruffle his hair as it missed him by less than half an inch.

Harry Dalby was the first to gain safety, leaping the track like an antelope and then flinging himself at full-length on the ground. Seconds later he was joined by his two companions and, for a moment or two, they were all too busy getting their breath back to do any talking. Then Dick Barrington levered himself upwards until he could peer across the track and the ground beyond to where the trucks were still standing. Even in the bad light he could see cattle being driven up the ramps of the trucks, shadowy figures moving in the light of carefully shaded lanterns. Dick became so interested that he grew careless.

Bang-bang-bang!

Three shots, so close together as to be almost simultaneous, dropped him like a shot rabbit. Indeed, so quickly did he drop that Tom Hall, thinking he had been hit, clutched Harry Dalby's arm in a vice-like grip and choked: "Harry! They've got Dick, they've got him. I——"

"Quiet!" hissed the third fellow. "I'm all right, but we can't stay here. They're bound to realise sooner or later that we are unarmed, and then they'll come into the open to make certain of us."

His face showing the relief he felt, Tom Hall looked at his friend. "Why should they?" he asked. "All they'll care about is getting away with those cattle. With beef at the price it is, they must have thousands of dollars stowed away in those trucks. All we have to do is to lie low and then——"

Dick interrupted with a shake of his head.

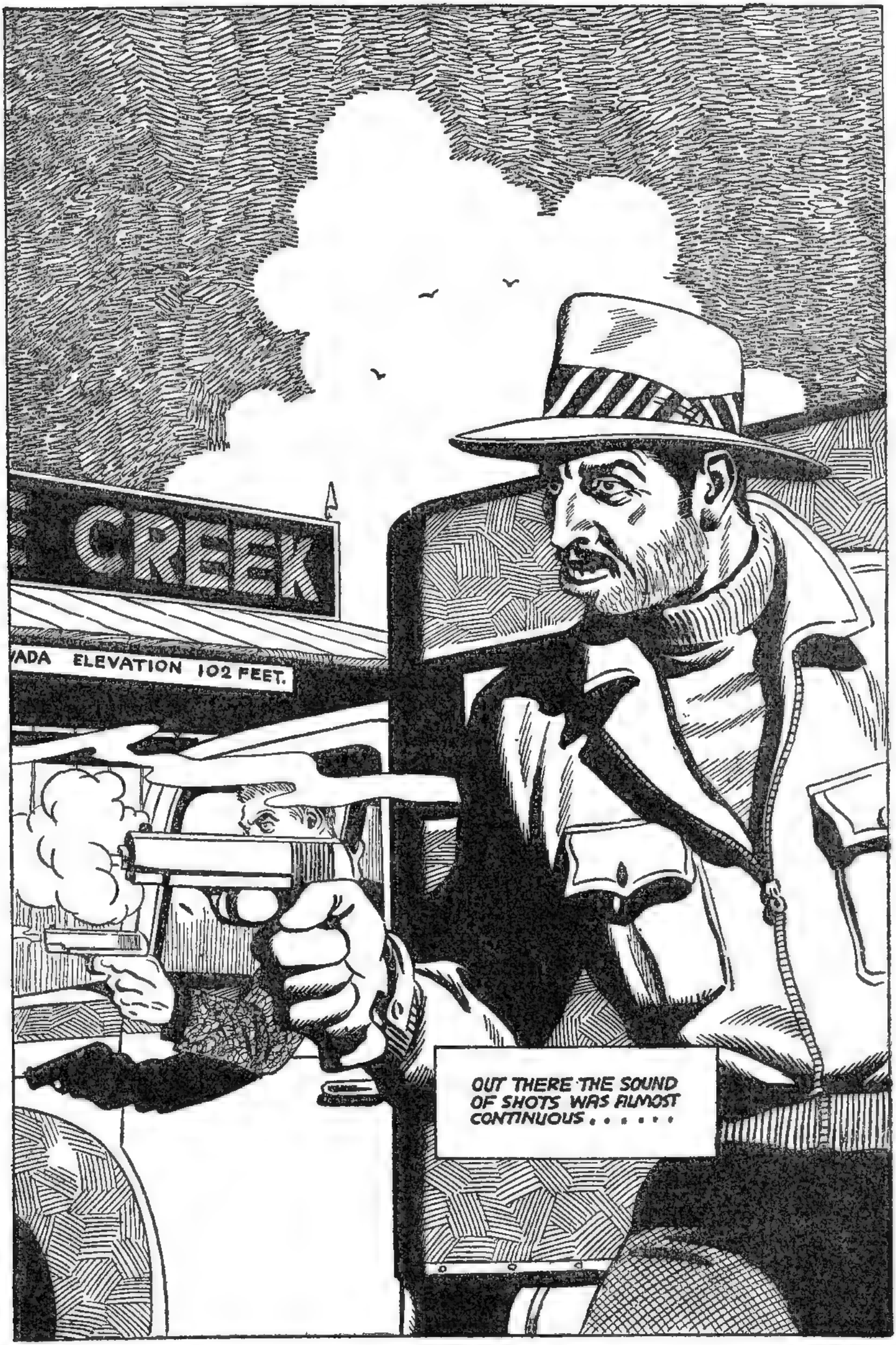
"Why not?" demanded the optimistic Tom.

"Because we're witnesses," came the gloomy reply. "True, we haven't seen them close to, but I for one have a pretty shrewd idea what they look like. One's a tall, thin guy, another's almost as broad as he is high—— No! We've got to make a real bolt for it, chaps!"

"Wait!" The word came from Harry. Now he was peering across the track. "Two of the trucks are leaving and three men are fanning out and coming this way. This is it, all right. Gosh! I'd give my entire stamp collection for five minutes of Gordon Gregory at this time. To think that we——" He never finished his sentence because, even as he spoke, there came a burst of gunfire from the left. Before Harry bobbed down again he saw the three men who were advancing fling themselves on to the ground. At the same instant he saw the orange stabs of flame from their guns as they fired from prone positions.

"Jingo!" hissed Dick. "It's the JB fellows. Sounds as if there are plenty of them."

It was true. Out there the sound of shots was almost continuous; and once there was a bellow of pain and then a man's voice roaring: "Pete's hit. Git him back to the trucks. I ain't lettin' anyone be nabbed. Get him away, I tell you. *Joe! Joe!* What the


CREEK
VADA ELEVATION 102 FEET.
OUT THERE THE SOUND OF SHOTS WAS ALMOST CONTINUOUS . . . . . .

heck's keeping you? Get them trucks away, I——" *Crash! Crash!* The voice was smothered in another volley of gunshots, and the reek of burning powder drifted across to the boys as Dick Barrington pointed sideways to where a heap of boulders would make an even better shelter.

"Let's go!" he bawled at last. The three stood up and ran, hearts pounding and fear gripping them as it had never done before, not even when faced with a thundering herd of buffalo or the wild war-cries of Apache redmen. This time they kept going, the sounds of battle coming continuously from their right. Dick had been right to choose that heap of boulders; they formed an almost complete natural fortress, and with loopholes to peer through they were able to get a grandstand view of what was going on. They saw a big truck lumber away with its load of bawling cattle; they saw one man being assisted by another across open ground; they caught the stab of orange flame in the now practically complete darkness and, more than all that, they saw a sturdy figure, silhouetted against the sky, standing foursquare on his two feet and blazing away with a rifle at his hip.

"They—they're getting away!" groaned Harry Dalby, and he moved restlessly.

"Stay where you are," snapped Dick. "Let 'em go. This is a private war this time and I want to get back to England all in one piece. Jingo!" he added. "If Gordon only knew about this he'd be as sick as blazes to have missed it. This is just the kind of thing he'd love."

"Quit talkin', kid!"

T., D. and H. spun round to stare open-mouthed at the dark figure that faced them, a scarf covering the lower half of his face. They stared also at the twin six-guns balanced delicately and expertly in the man's hands.

"Get movin'," rasped the newcomer who, unseen, had crept up on the boys. "I'm not foolin'. If those pals of yours out there don't plug you, then, mabbe, you'll live to eat another supper, but I'll tell you this for nothin'. If you don't keep movin' in front of me, I'll plug all three of you as quick as I can trigger my guns. I don't usually miss, kids."

Slowly the boys looked at one another. Why on earth hadn't they foreseen this possibility? Obviously this man—he was the tall, thin fellow among the rustlers—intended to use them as living shields in order to make a getaway. But there was nothing they could do about it except to obey orders. Harry Dalby shuddered as the man came closer and he looked into cold, fishlike eyes—the eyes of a born killer.

"Get goin'!" he snapped. "If it hadn't been for you meddlin' brats I'd have been away an hour ago." The man prodded Dick in the small of the back and they left the shelter of the natural fortress and walked slowly, the three boys in front, across the open ground. "Remember," growled the rustler. "One wrong move from any of you and I'll be doing some target practice. Heck!" The exclamation held a deal of venom. "I should plug all three of you right now."

"Halt!"

Out of the darkness came an imperious command.

The man halted and T., D. and H. did the same. All four waited, the seconds dragging by.

"Listen, Mister," came from the masked man. "I've got three young fellers here who, so far as I can make out, just happened to get in the way. They're as innocent as new-born babes, but I'll plug them if you take another step forward. Do you get me?"

"I hear you!" came the reply.

"O.K." Sharply. "Then see you don't give me cause for complaint. I ain't foolin', Mister Who-ever-you-are. Get goin', kids. Quick march."

Slowly the little procession moved forward and the boys, straining their eyes, tried to make out the figure of their would-be rescuer from the JB ranch, but it was too dark and the night seemed to be filled with shadowy figures. Yard by yard they moved across the uneven ground until they were crossing the track again. Shivers ran up and down their spines, and any moment they expected to feel the crash of a ·45 bullet against their backs. The palms of their hands were damp with perspiration, the perspiration of genuine fear, and they dreaded a stumble lest the rustler would think them attempting to make a getaway and shoot before waiting for explanations.

Quite suddenly they were close to the last waiting truck. A restless movement from inside the big, covered vehicle meant that, like the others, it had been already loaded. Tom spoke out of the corner of his mouth. "Where are the other JB fellows?" he muttered. "Let's make a break for it, Dick. That fellow must be covered and——"

"Stop!"

The order came from the masked rustler. The boys halted and waited.

Crash!

A six-gun blazed from close at hand and the next second the tall, thin man had kicked out at Tom Hall, who was nearest. The boy tried to grab the outflung leg, missed, and then pitched forward on his face. What happened after that was like a nightmare. Shots followed each other in quick succession, hoarse voices yelled in the darkness and then came the whine of a self-starter and the roar of a truck engine. A cow bellowed and, flattened against a railroad corral, the three boys saw the great lumbering vehicle roar away into the darkness, yellow stabs of flame coming from the

THEY SAW A STURDY FIGURE, SILHOUETTED AGAINST THE SKY, STANDING FORESQUARE ON HIS TWO FEET AND BLAZING AWAY WITH A RIFLE AT HIS HIP . . . . . .

driver's cab. It came round in a swinging arc, rocking dangerously and nearly overturning. Then it came down on all four wheels once more and was away in a cloud of choking dust. The listeners heard the crashing of gears, a last frightened cry from one of its unwilling four-legged passengers and then only the hum of a fast-revving engine that grew fainter and fainter.

"Phew!" Tom Hall whistled and rose to an upright position. "You chaps all right?"

"Tell you later," came Harry's reply. "I've got to count my arms and legs first. Tell you one thing, though, my head's buzzing like a circular saw."

"Stop talking," snapped Dick Barrington, once more taking the lead, as he invariably did. "Hey!" He let out a yell. "Anyone there? Hey! They've got away, fellers!"

Harry gripped his friend's arm. "Here comes someone now," he whispered. "Gosh! If only I'd got a six-gun in my—my——" The words just trailed away and his mouth was left wide open in a positively vacant expression as he stared down at his right hand and at the heavy colt that was held loosely in fingers that trembled with sheer amazement. Harry Dalby must have stood like that for a good five seconds, even as the eyes of his two friends swung round and stared, first at him and then at the gun which had so miraculously made its appearance.

It was Dick who found his tongue first.

"GORDON!" he squeaked, and he spun round like a surprised—nay dumbfounded—top.

"Hello, fellows!"

A figure came slowly forward.

"It *is*——" yelped Tom Hall. "It *is* you, Gordon. Why—why didn't you turn up half an hour ago?" It was all he could find *to* say.

"Where are the JB fellows?" put in a rapidly recovering Dick.

The ghostly schoolboy, who had first manifested himself at Colden College longer ago than any of the three boys could really remember—although it wasn't all *that* time ago but just seemed like it—grinned hugely. "What JB fellows?" he asked. "I haven't seen any!"

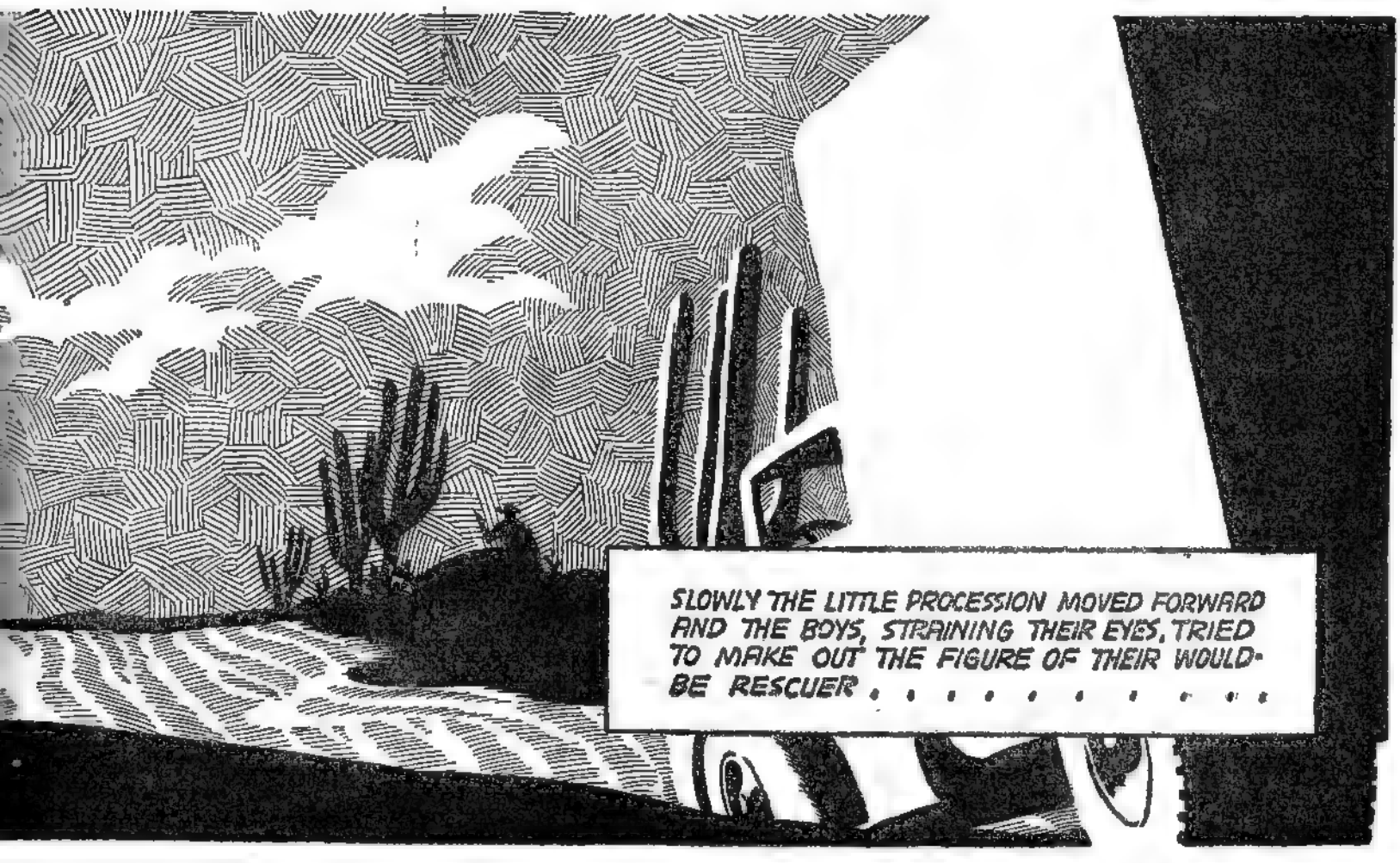
"But—but who drove those hoodlums off?" demanded Tom Hall.

Gordon bowed as he gently relieved Harry of the six-gun he had, with his amazing powers, caused to appear in the boy's hand. "I did what I could, chaps!" he explained. "As a matter of fact I was a little late and it took some time to round up Bill Cody, Wild Bill and a few others. However, we managed it all right. No, Dick, they've gone now!" added the speaker, as he saw the leader of the trio peering into the darkness. "There's only yours truly here right now. Look, supposing we squat down. I've got a lot to say to you three and some of it isn't going to be very welcome."

"You're not *leaving* us?" howled the three in chorus.

"Sit *down*!" That commanding voice was not to be disobeyed. T., D. and H. sat and waited. "I knew you were in America, of course," went on the very solid ghost, whose trick it was to appear in the form of himself as a boy, "but I thought I'd leave you on your own this time. I argued that you might enjoy seeing the West in modern times."

Dick Barrington voiced his feelings with a grunt. Gordon Gregory laughed. "O.K.," he said, "I get it; anyway, I dismissed you from my mind until one of you said something about me. Then I took a look-see and realised you were up against it. Don't


SLOWLY THE LITTLE PROCESSION MOVED FORWARD AND THE BOYS, STRAINING THEIR EYES, TRIED TO MAKE OUT THE FIGURE OF THEIR WOULD-BE RESCUER . . . . . .

worry about those hoodlums who got away, I've already made certain that the Sheriff and a posse grabs them and sees that they do a few years in the penitentiary. Anyway, you had no business to be at Coyote Creek at all."

"But this isn't——" began Dick.

"It is," interrupted Gordon. "That idiot of a porter dropped you off too soon. Cotton Creek's six miles farther up the track."

The three boys looked at one another, the same thought occurring to each.

"Jingo! They'll be waiting for us!" said Harry. He pulled a face. "I say, Gordon——"

"Don't say it," snapped the other. "Let's be more comfortable first. Hold hands."

There was sheer delight visible on the faces of the three boys as they hastened to form a link with their strange friend. Then the earth rocked about them, there was a roaring sound in their ears and a moment's silence before Gordon told them to open their eyes.

What exactly T., D. and H. expected to find they didn't quite know, but what they did find was a blazing campfire with a savoury-smelling pot hanging from a tripod erected over it. Gordon Gregory was stirring the stew the pot contained and looking steadily at his friends.

"Now we can talk," he said, "or leastways I'll do the talking and you listen. To be truthful, I had decided not to see you again. I had an idea that it's not good for you. Yes," he added hastily, "I know I may be wrong, but that's the way I feel, or felt. When I knew that you were coming to the States under your own steam I was delighted and even when I—well kind of 'looked-in' and saw that you were not having as good a time as you would have liked, I still decided to leave you alone. Then you walked into that spot of bother at Coyote Creek and—well, here we are!"

"And here we stay!" cried Tom Hall. "You can't leave us now, Gordon. You can't. *You* can fix things so that people won't notice anything wrong and . . ."

"I can fix anything," agreed the ghostly schoolboy, "but in half an hour I propose to put the clock back an hour or so, just to allow you to board the southbound 'Flyer' Limited once more. I'm sorry, but my mind is made up, so let's make the best of things, eh? Who says stew?" He grinned. "You'll find tin plates close to you. I'm not likely to overlook a little thing like that, am I?"

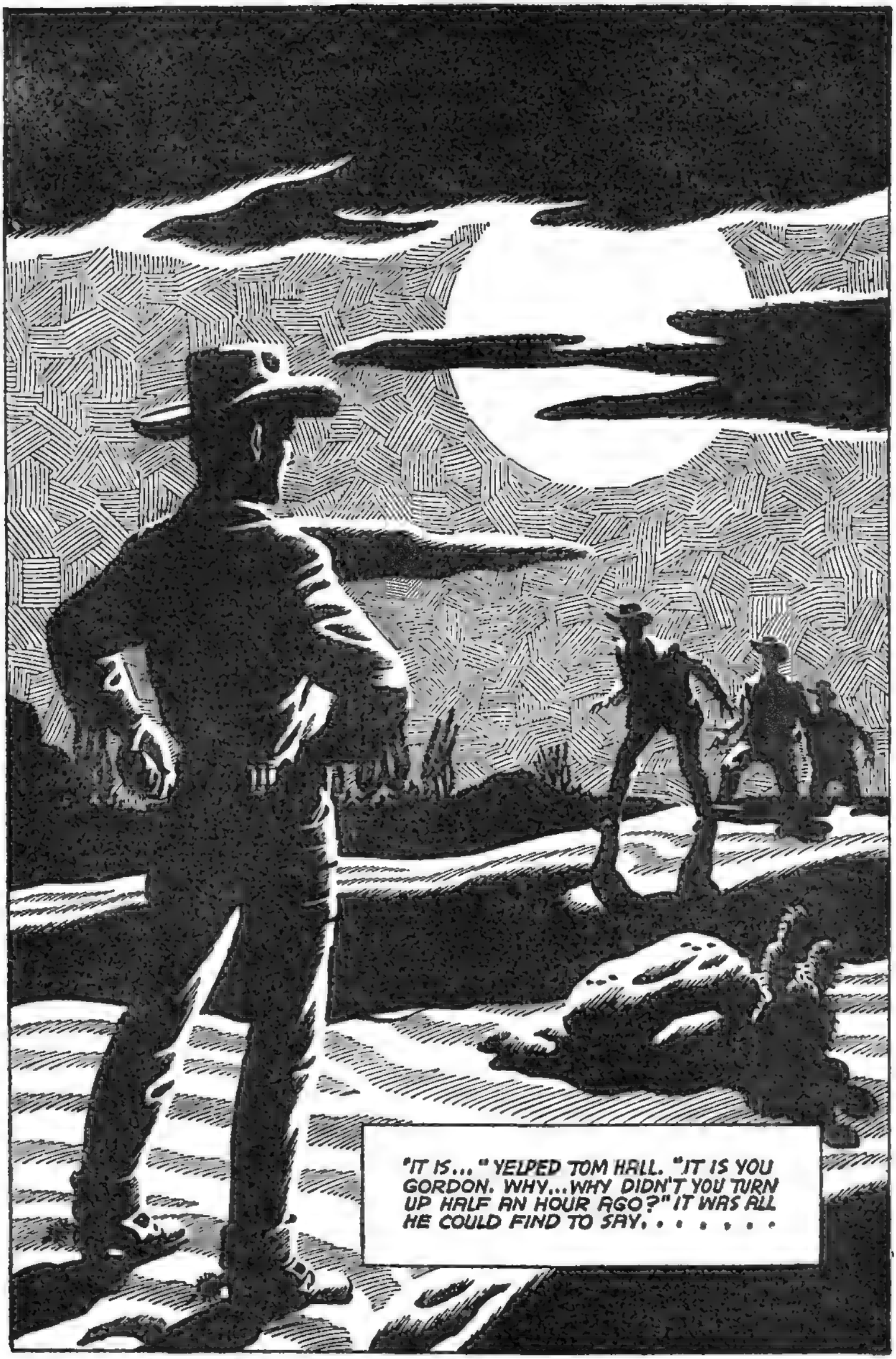
Tom, Dick and Harry sighed as they picked up the plates they found and accepted helpings of the delicious stew. No one said anything for several minutes. Then Dick Barrington sprang to his feet as if he had been bitten by a rattler. "*Gordon!*" he yelled wildly. "*Gordon—where are you?* Tom, Harry——" He looked down at the others. "He's *gone*!"

It was true. There was no sign of Gordon Gregory. It was just as if he had never manifested himself at all.

"What on earth are we to do?" gasped Harry glumly. "We can't explain all this to the JB people; they'll think we're mad or something. Say something, you two—don't just stand there. Let's get back to the station—er—depot or whatever it is. Perhaps that rustler raid never happened, perhaps Gordon fixed everything and the train will be along all over again as he said he'd make it; perhaps——"

"Perhaps you'll keep quiet for a bit, Harry," came the all-too-familiar voice of Gordon. "Sorry to startle you, but I had to pop off to the JB ranch and I didn't have time to explain. Your visit there is cancelled."

"*Cancelled?*" The word came from the boys in a delighted chorus.


"IT IS..." YELPED TOM HALL. "IT IS YOU GORDON. WHY...WHY DIDN'T YOU TURN UP HALF AN HOUR AGO?" IT WAS ALL HE COULD FIND TO SAY. . . . . .

Gordon Gregory nodded.

"That's right," he said, "like the fellows at Coyote Creek, they've had trouble. Anyway, your trip to the ranch is off, so I suppose . . ."

"*You'll give us a different trip!*" squeaked Tom.

The ghostly fellow nodded. "Why not?" he said. "So long as I knew you were O.K. I didn't think I ought to butt in, but now you're at a loose end, as it were, I may as well take you along with me." The speaker positively beamed, and a moment later he was by Dick's side and a real reunion was being held. The four banged each other on the back, they wrung each other's hands, they talked nineteen to the dozen and laughed at the weakest possible jokes cracked by Gordon, whose humour was inclined to be of the slightly old-fashioned type.

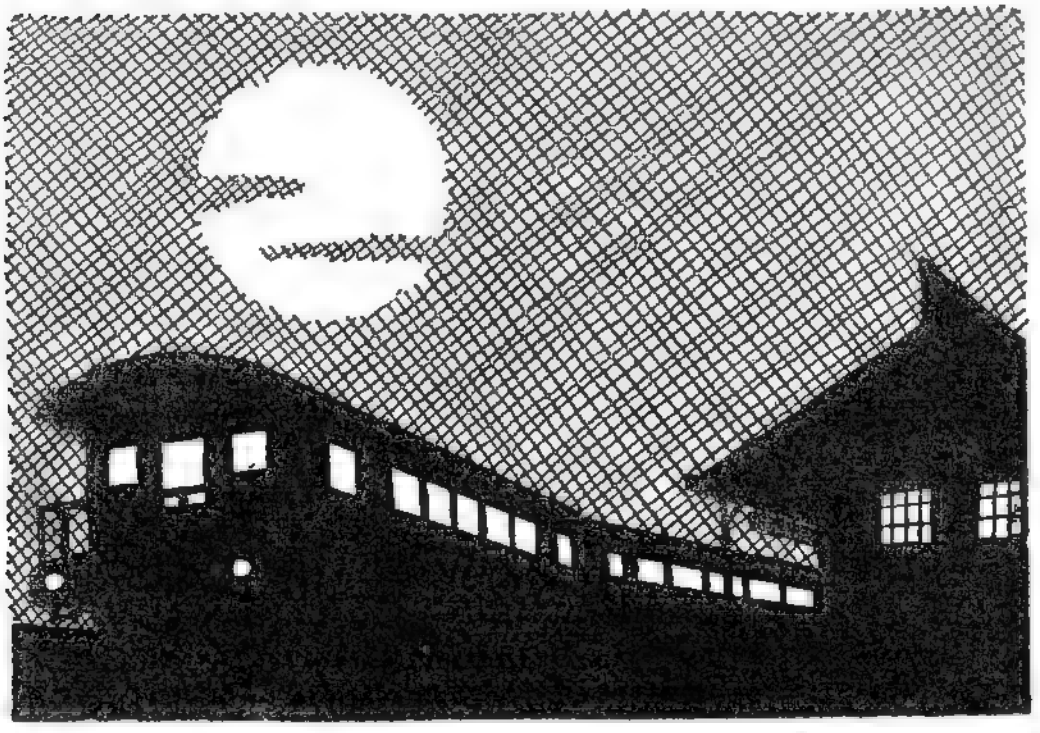
"Well," said Gordon at last. "I think we'll turn in for a few hours and talk things over in the morning."

Tom, Dick and Harry looked at each other.

"Oh no we *don't*!" they chorused. "We want a yarn first, *and* a good one!" added Dick.

Gordon hesitated for a moment or two. Then, as a distant coyote gave tongue to waken the echoes among the foothills of the Hot Creek Mountains, he grinned and squatted down by the blazing campfire.

"O.K.," he said. "What's it to be?"



THE U.S. MARSHAL

Rugged, sunbronzed and fast-shooting was the man behind the lawman's star in the days when the bandit wolf-packs terrorized the Western trails.

SUCH A MAN WAS WYATT EARP.

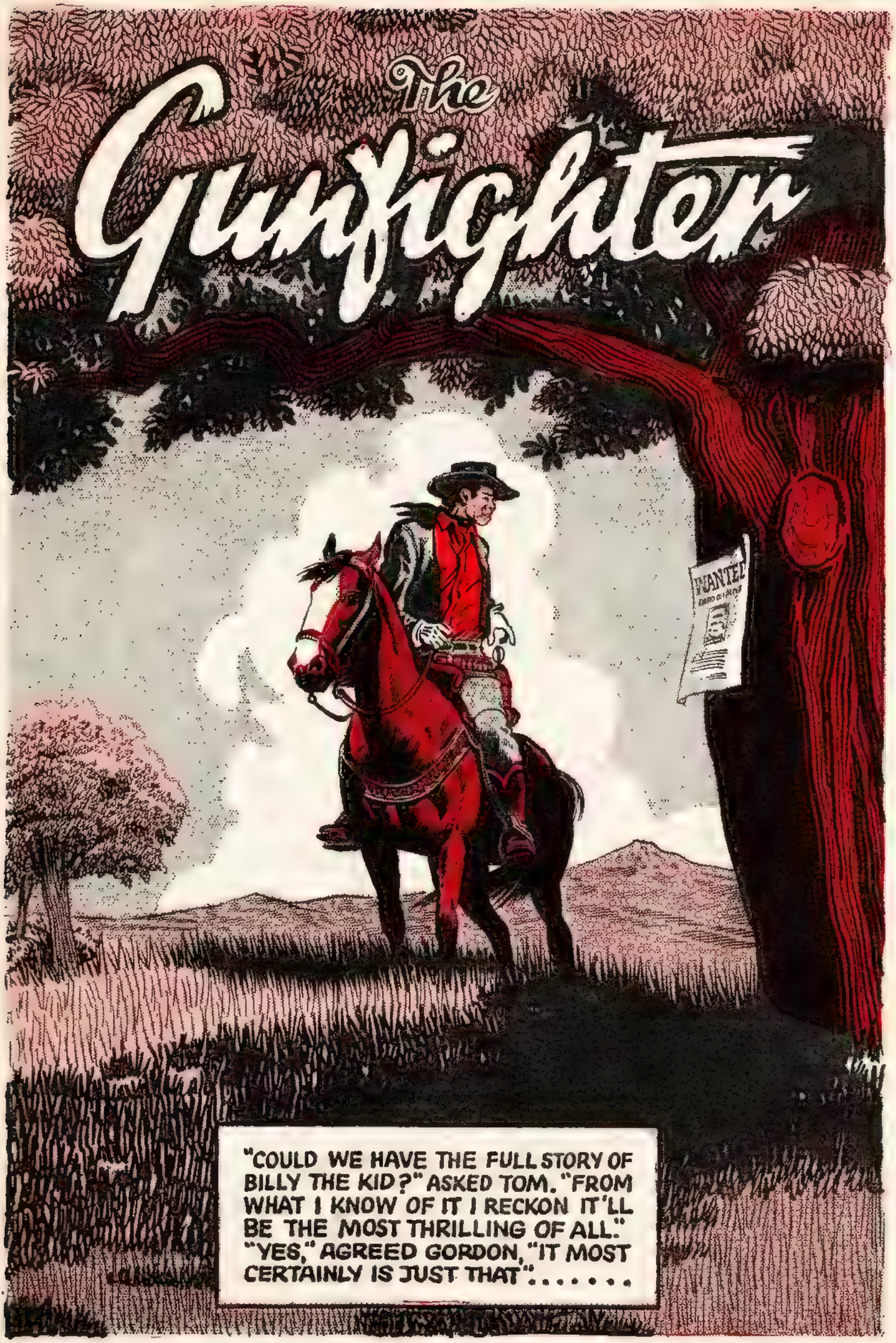
Such Men made Wild West History

THE GUN FIGHTER

Sometimes outlaws, sometimes lawmen, these fast-drawing wizards of the sixgun blazed their way across the West in the latter part of the eighteen-hundreds.

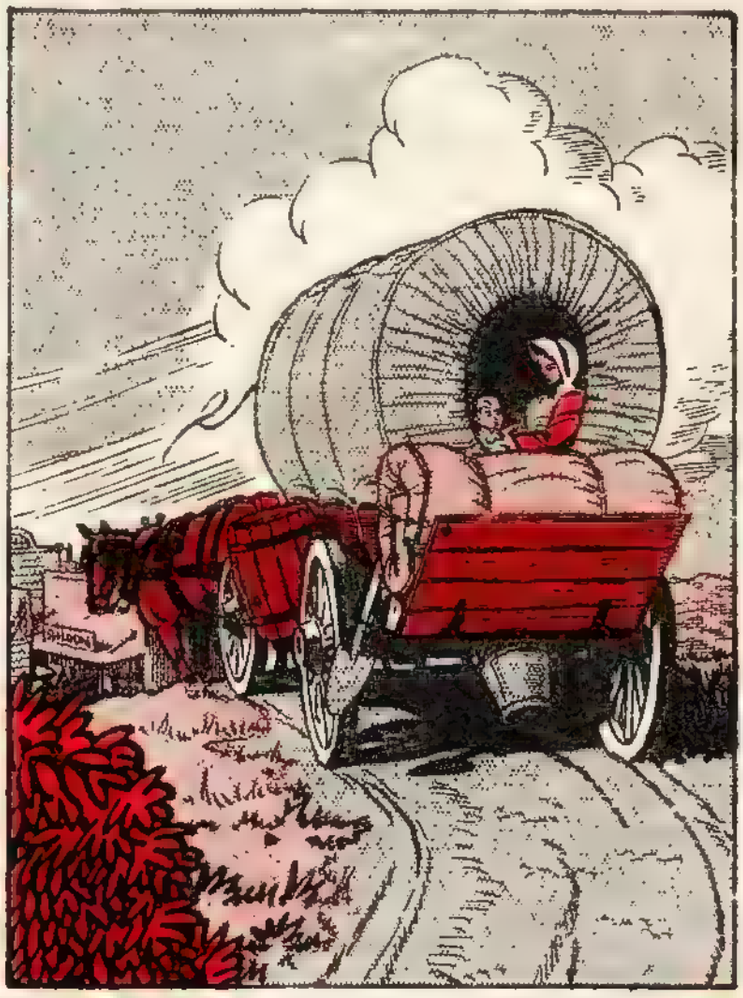
SUCH A MAN WAS WILD BILL HICKOCK.

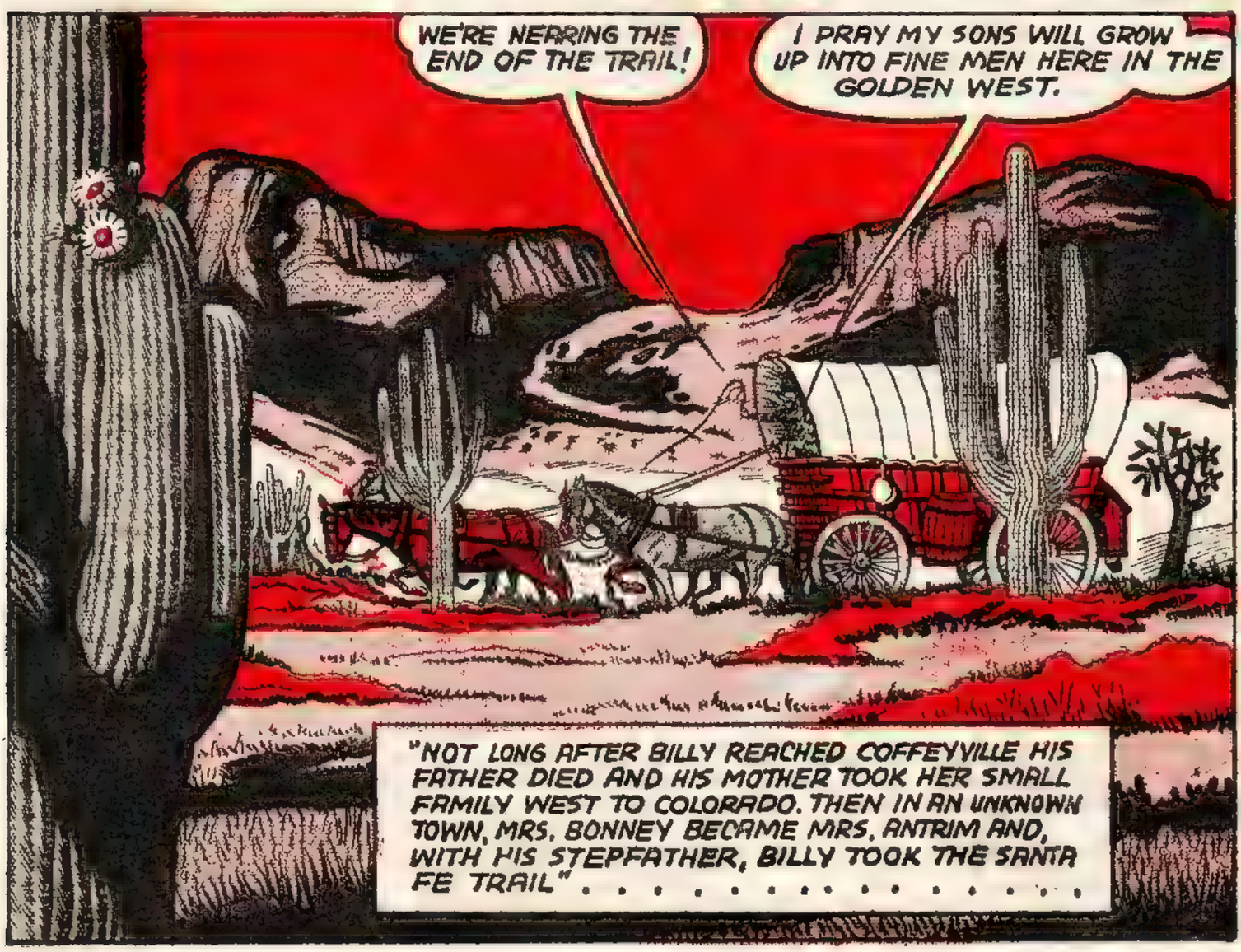
Such Men made Wild West History


The Gunfighter
WANTED
"COULD WE HAVE THE FULL STORY OF BILLY THE KID?" ASKED TOM. "FROM WHAT I KNOW OF IT I RECKON IT'LL BE THE MOST THRILLING OF ALL."
"YES," AGREED GORDON, "IT MOST CERTAINLY IS JUST THAT".....

"BILLY WAS BORN TO MR. AND MRS. WILLIAM H. BONNEY IN NEW YORK CITY ON NOVEMBER 23RD, 1859. . . . . .

"WHEN BILLY WAS THREE HIS FAMILY EMIGRATED TO THE WEST AND FINALLY REACHED THE TINY TOWN OF COFFEYVILLE, KANSAS. BY THAT TIME THERE WAS ANOTHER CHILD, EDWARD". . . . .





"NOT LONG AFTER BILLY REACHED COFFEYVILLE HIS FATHER DIED AND HIS MOTHER TOOK HER SMALL FAMILY WEST TO COLORADO. THEN IN AN UNKNOWN TOWN, MRS. BONNEY BECAME MRS. ANTRIM AND, WITH HIS STEPFATHER, BILLY TOOK THE SANTA FE TRAIL". . . . . .

"BILLY GREW UP IN SANTA FE AND, WITH OTHER BOYS, WOULD FOLLOW THE FAMOUS INDIAN FIGHTER, KIT CARSON, WHEN THEIR HERO RODE INTO TOWN"

HULLO BOYS!

HURRAH FOR KIT CARSON!

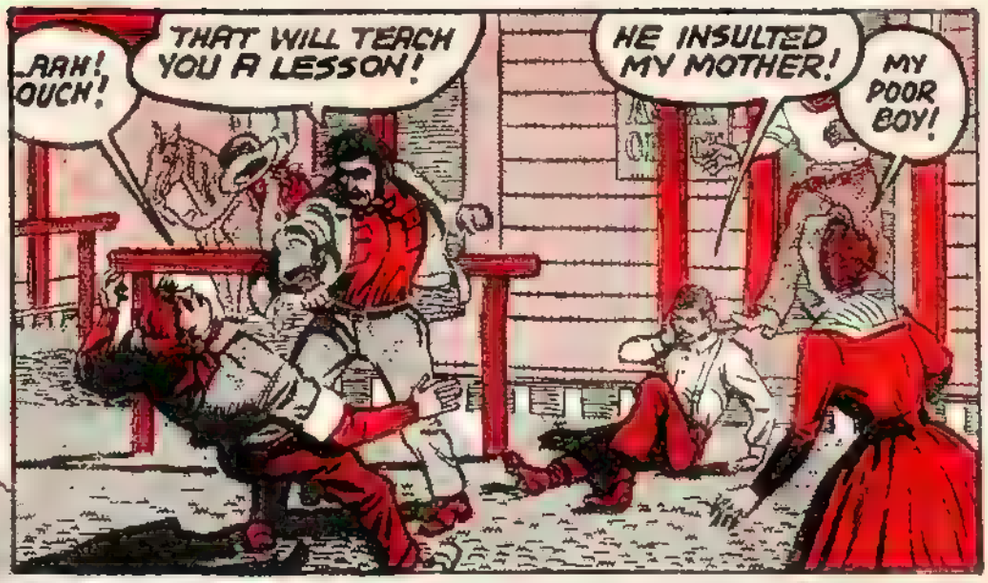
YOU BAD BOY!

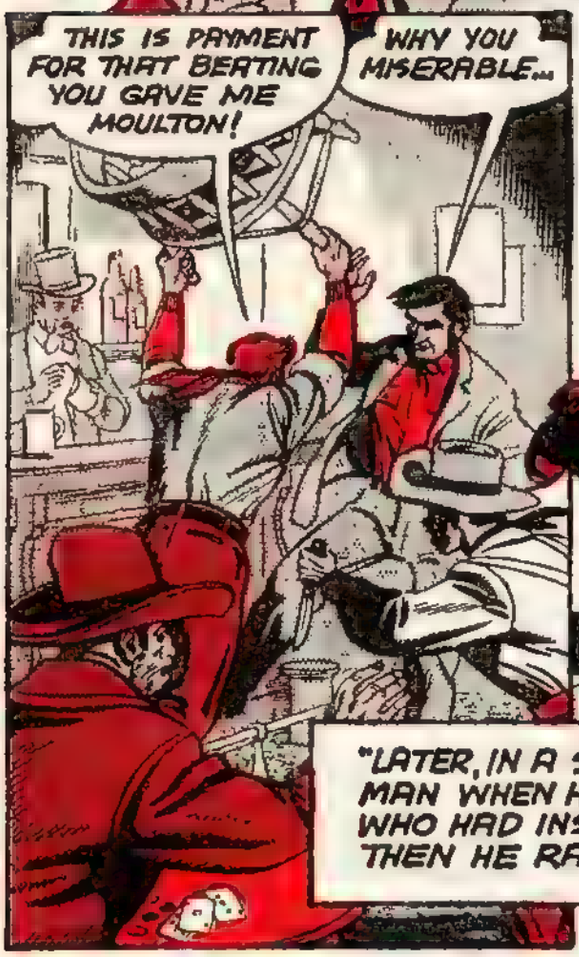
"IN 1868 THE ANTRIMS MOVED TO SILVER CITY IN NEW MEXICO. AT SCHOOL BILLY WAS BRIGHT AT HIS LESSONS AND QUITE A HAPPY YOUNGSTER BUT HAD A FIERY TEMPER"

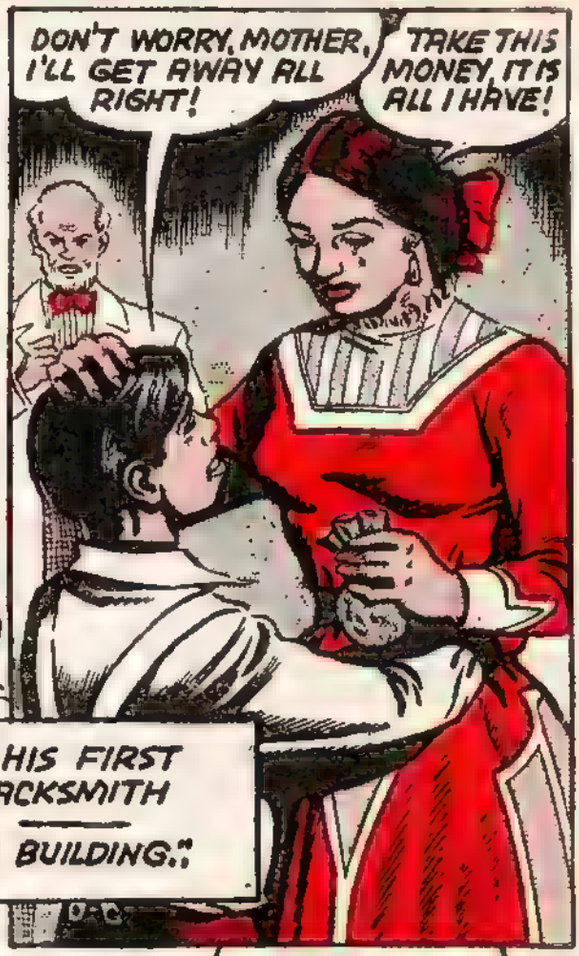
WATCH ME BILLY BOY!

"SOON YOUNG BILLY BONNEY GOT IN WITH BAD COMPANY AND WAS TAUGHT MANY TRICKS BY THE GAMBLERS OF SILVER CITY'S SALOONS AND GAMBLING DENS"

"WHEN BILLY WAS TWELVE YEARS OLD SOMETHING HAPPENED THAT WAS TO ALTER HIS WHOLE LIFE. HIS MOTHER WAS INSULTED BY A BLACKSMITH IN THE STREET, HE STOOD UP TO THE MAN AND WAS THEN HELPED BY A PASSER-BY CALLED MOULTON" . . . . .

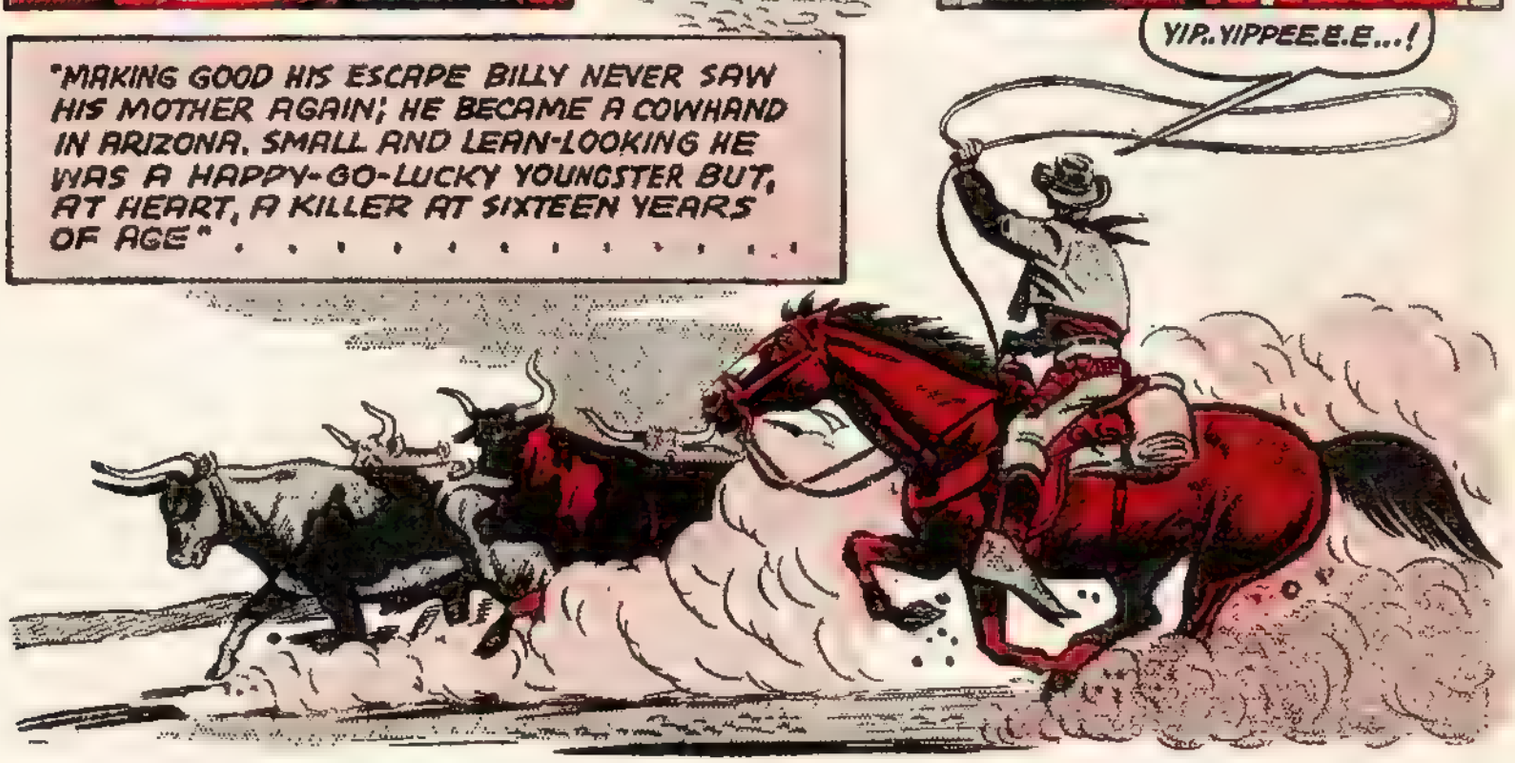




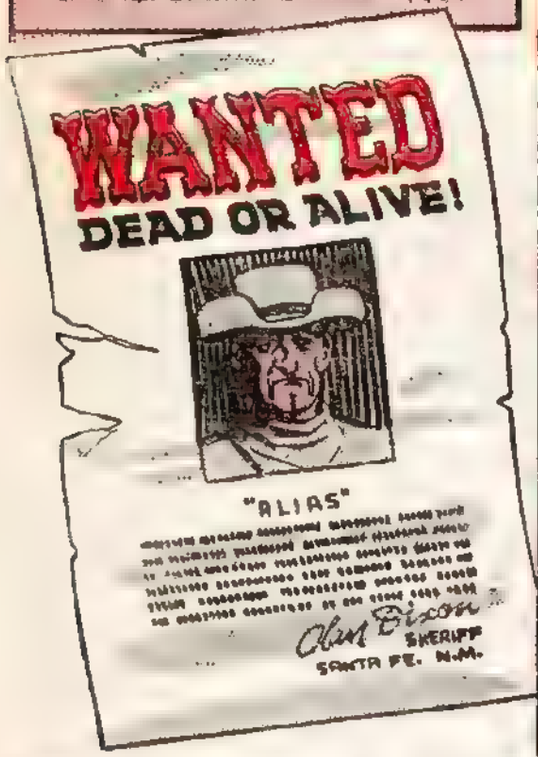


"LATER, IN A SALOON, BILLY KILLED HIS FIRST MAN WHEN HE STABBED THE BLACKSMITH WHO HAD INSULTED HIS MOTHER, —— THEN HE RAN WILDLY FROM THE BUILDING."

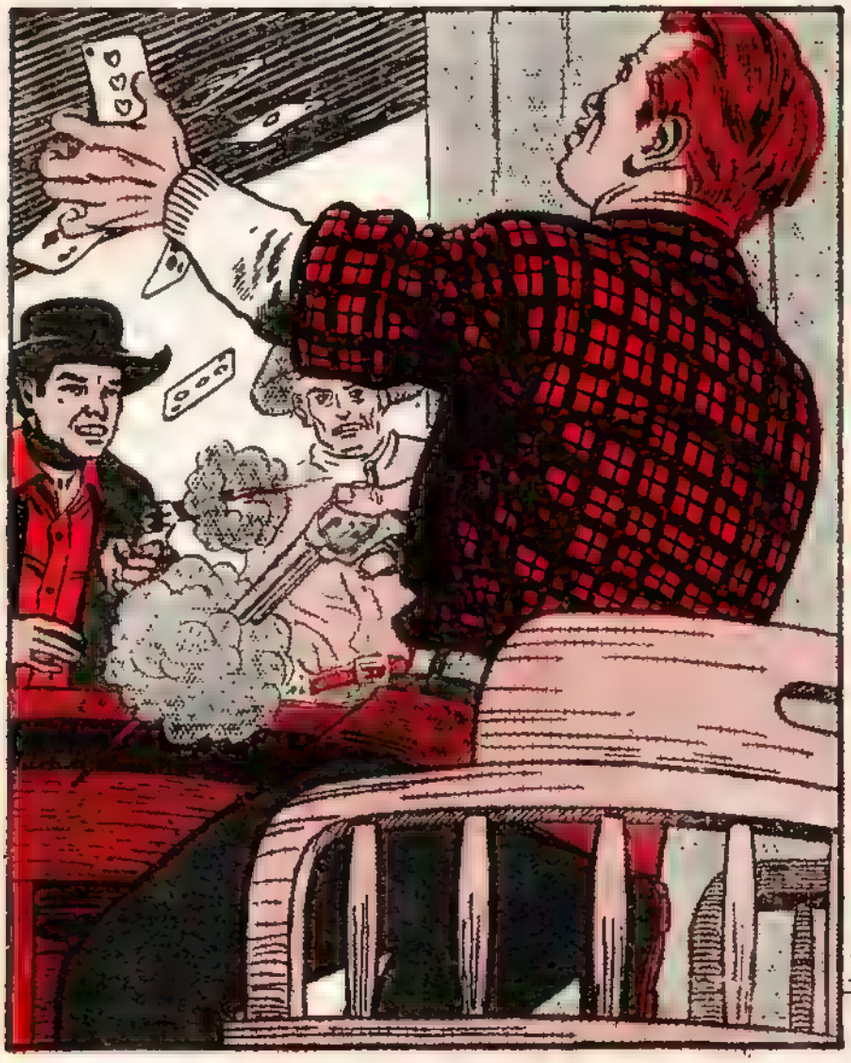
"MAKING GOOD HIS ESCAPE BILLY NEVER SAW HIS MOTHER AGAIN; HE BECAME A COWHAND IN ARIZONA. SMALL AND LEAN-LOOKING HE WAS A HAPPY-GO-LUCKY YOUNGSTER BUT, AT HEART, A KILLER AT SIXTEEN YEARS OF AGE" . . . . . .

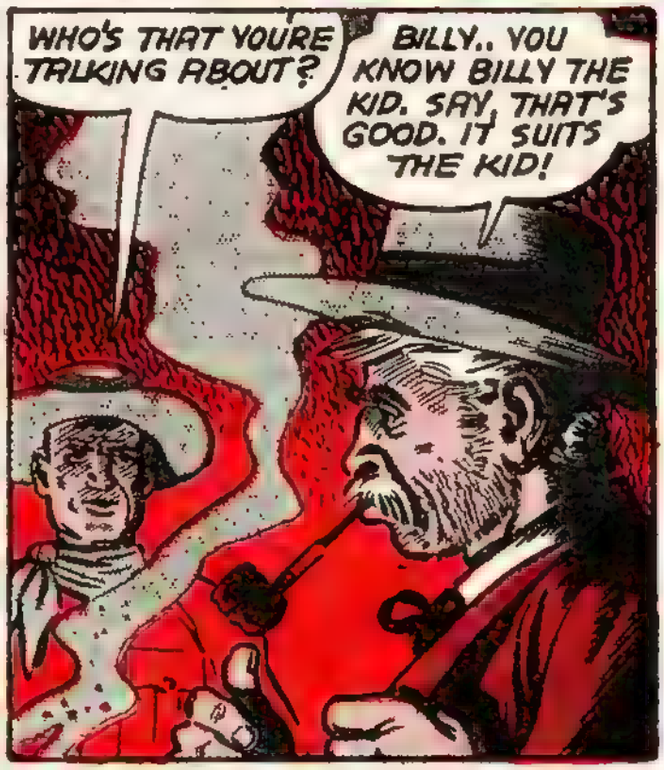


"TIRING OF HONEST WORK, HE TEAMED UP WITH A GUNMAN KNOWN ONLY BY THE NAME OF "ALIAS"... WITH THIS MAN HE KILLED THREE WEALTHY BUT DEFENCELESS INDIANS. THIS WAS BILLY THE KID'S WORST CRIME OF HIS CAREER"....



"PARTING FROM "ALIAS," BILLY LIVED BY HIS WITS AND HIS SKILL AT CARDS. THEN, ONE DAY, HE KILLED A MAN IN A CARD GAME. NO ONE KNOWS, HOWEVER, WHAT WAS THE CAUSE OF THE QUARREL OR THE VICTIM'S NAME". . . . . .

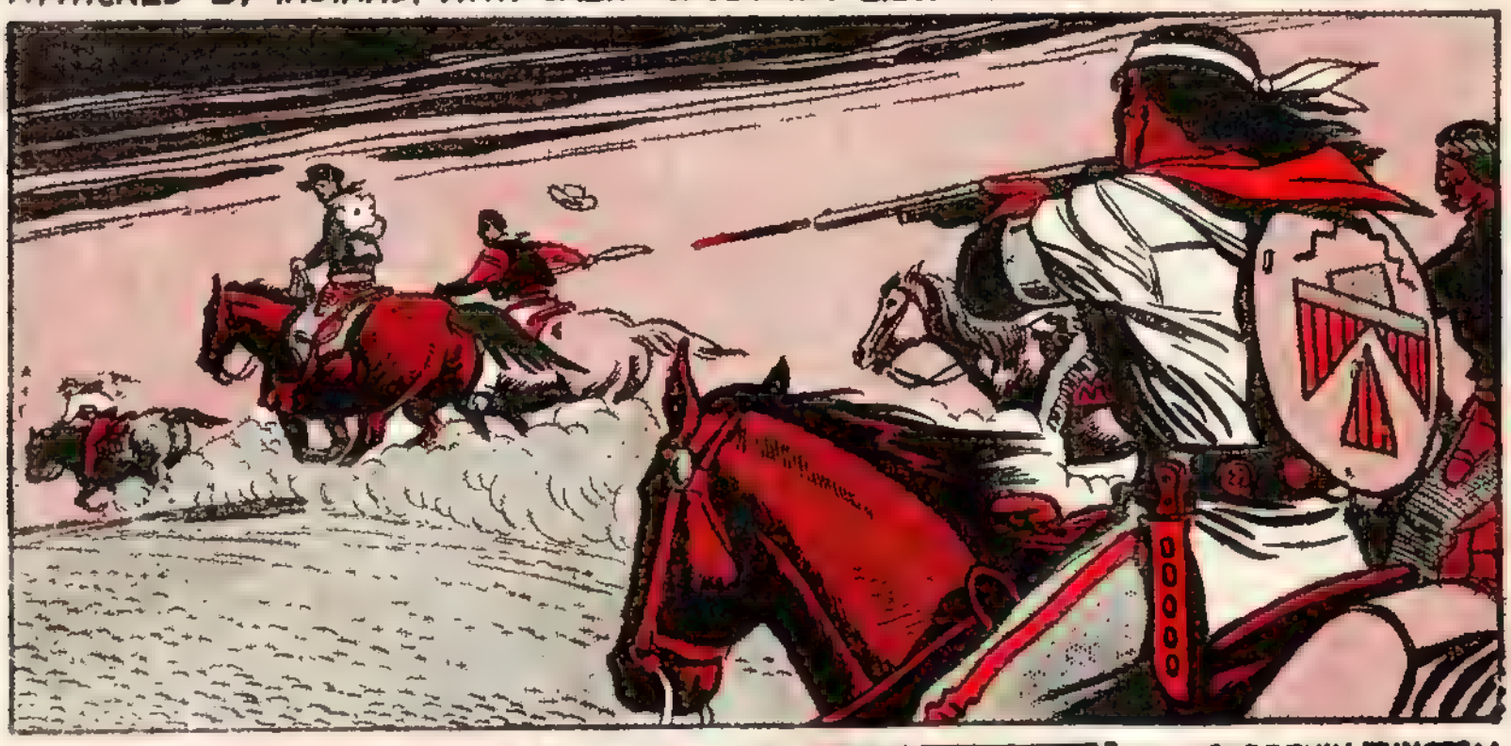




"A LITTLE LATER BILLY, RIDING REIN-LOOSE AS A GUN-PACKING OUTLAW WITH A NUMBER OF OTHER MEN WAS GIVEN HIS FAMOUS NICKNAME BY A MAN NAMED MC DANIELS"....

"HEARING THAT A FRIEND WAS IN JAIL IN THE RIO GRANDE BILLY THE KID RODE EIGHTY MILES TO THE RESCUE".....

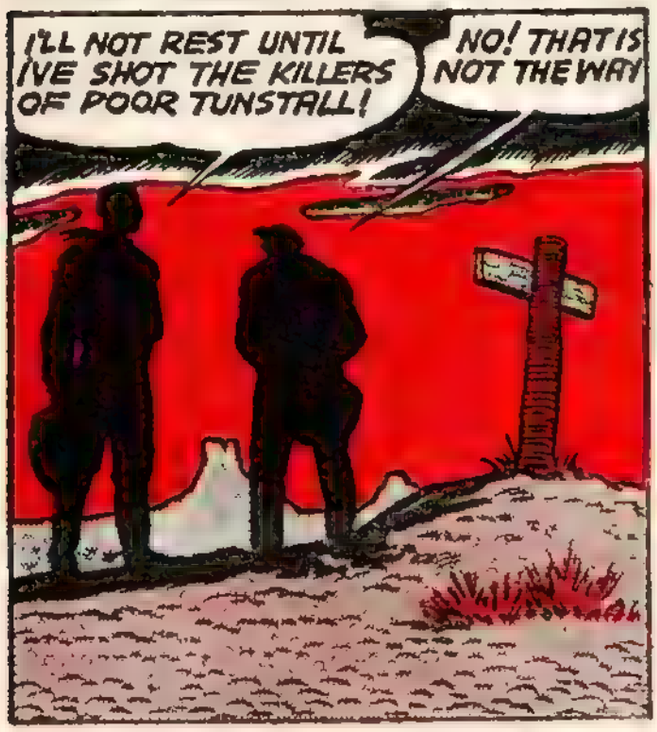
"NOT LONG AFTER THE RESCUE OF HIS FRIEND, BILLY AND SOME COMPANIONS WERE ATTACKED BY INDIANS. WITH GREAT GALLANTRY BILLY FOUGHT HIS WAY CLEAR".....

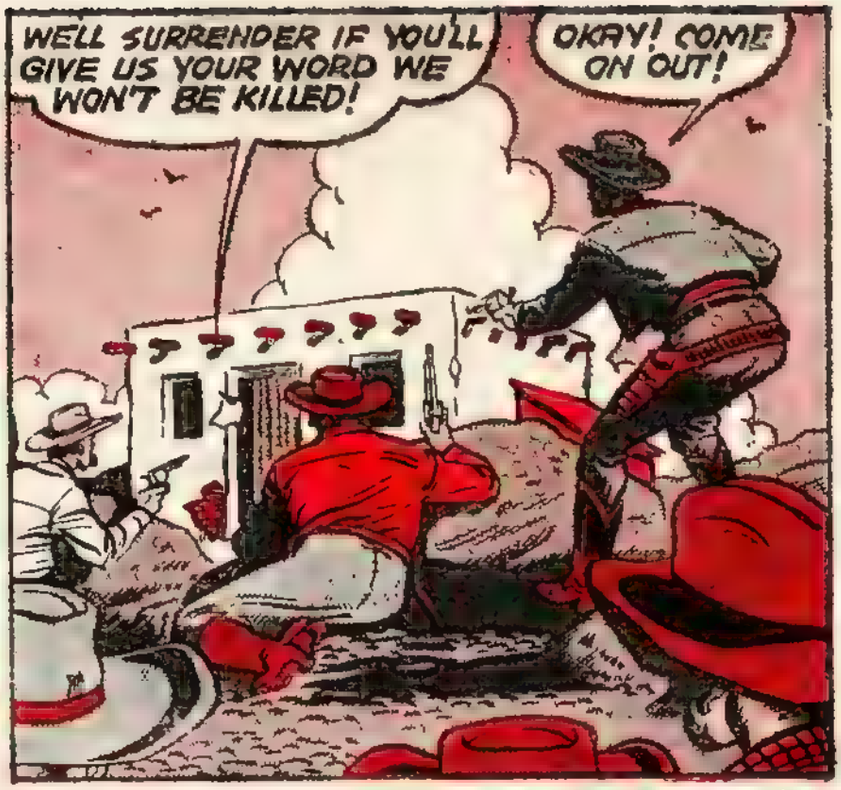


"WHEN EIGHTEEN YEARS OF AGE BILLY THE KID GOT A POSITION WITH A WEALTHY ENGLISH RANCHER NAMED TUNSTALL IN LINCOLN CO. THE TWO BECAME FIRM FRIENDS BUT TROUBLE LOOMED AHEAD..... THERE WAS A CATTLE WAR BETWEEN A MAN NAMED MURPHY AND FAMOUS JOHN CHISHUM OF CHISHUM TRAIL FAME WHOSE INTERESTS WERE LOOKED AFTER BY A LAWYER NAMED MC SWEEN.

"..... SUDDENLY TUNSTALL WAS BRUTALLY KILLED DURING THIS CATTLE WAR"

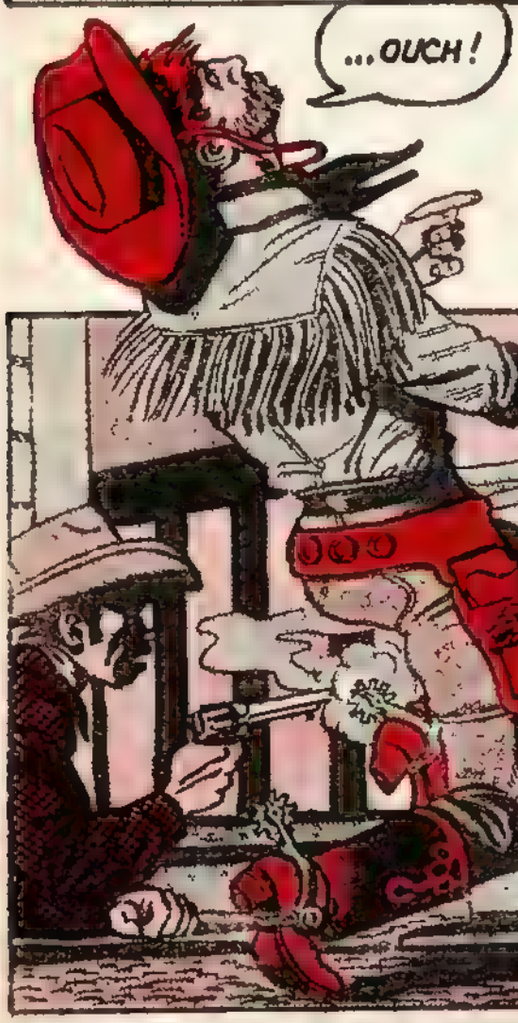
"ENRAGED BY THE DEATH OF HIS FRIEND, AT THE HANDS OF HIS OLD BUDDIES, BILLY SWORE TO GET HIS REVENGE, ALTHOUGH THE LAWYER MC SWEEN SAID THAT IT WAS JUSTICE, NOT VENGEANCE, HE WAS SEEKING."

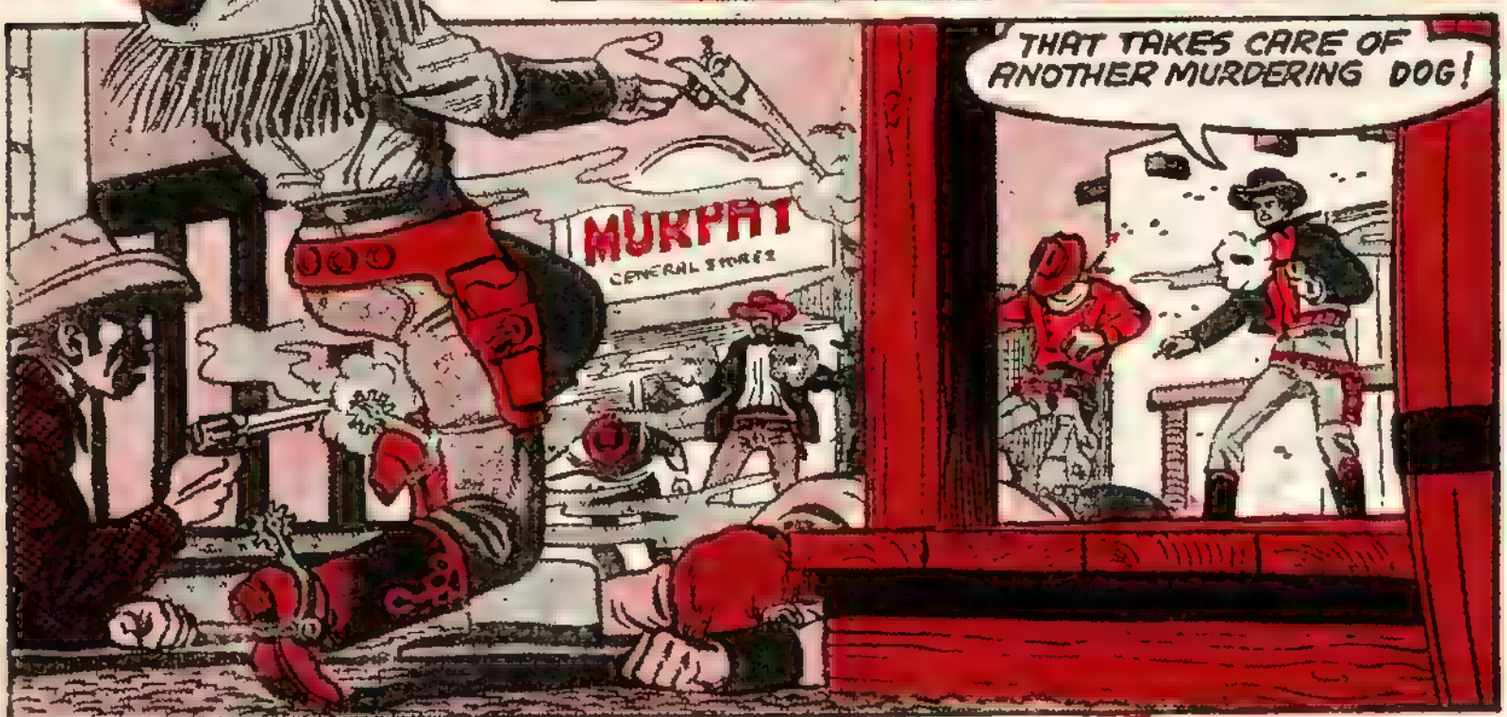




"DETERMINED TO GET EVERY MAN CONCERNED IN THE DEATH OF HIS FRIEND, BILLY THE KID LED A POSSE IN SEARCH OF TWO MEN BY THE NAMES OF MORTON AND BAKER".

"A DAY OR SO LATER THE KID AVENGED TUNSTALL WHEN HE SHOT THE TWO PRISONERS AS THEY TRIED TO ESCAPE".





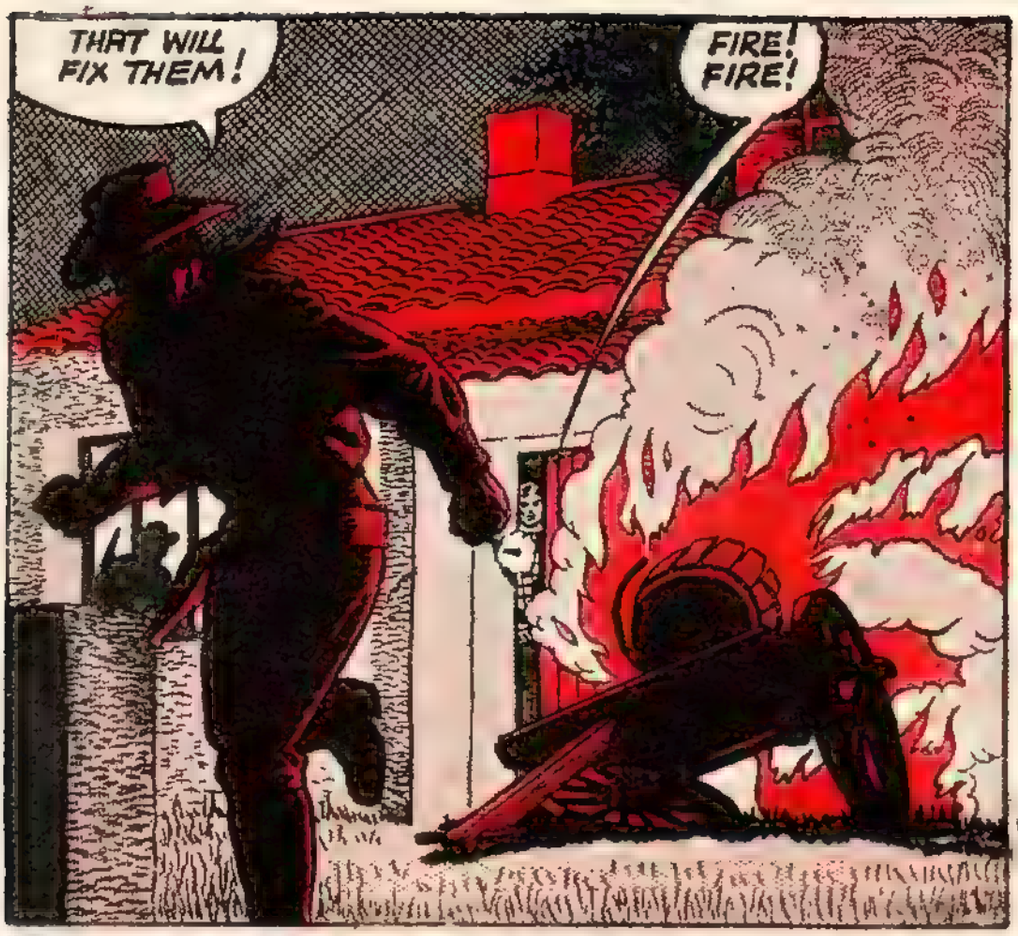
"THUS DID TWO PRIVATE ARMIES WAGE WAR, ONE IN SUPPORT OF MURPHY, THE OTHER IN SUPPORT OF MC SWEEN ACTING FOR CHISHUM. BILLY WAS SECOND-IN-COMMAND OF THE MC SWEEN ARMY UNDER A GUNFIGHTER NAMED BREWER".

"DURING THIS CATTLE WAR ONE OF THE BRAVEST ACTS THAT CAME OUT OF IT WAS THE DEFIANCE, BY A MURPHY MAN NAMED ROBERTS, OF A DOZEN MC SWEEN MEN INCLUDING BILLY THE KID. HE FINALLY DIED OF HIS MANY WOUNDS BUT THE WAR WENT ON". . . . . .
"SHERIFF BRADY OF LINCOLN COUNTY BACKED THE MURPHY FACTION AND, ONE DAY, HE AND A POSSE MADE A RAID ON THE MC SWEEN MEN IN LINCOLN ITSELF. BRADY WAS KILLED, AND BILLY, WITH A FRIEND, MADE A DAREDEVIL SALLY TO GET THE SHERIFF'S WEAPONS". . . . . .
LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!
I'M HIT BUT I CAN MAKE IT!
..AAH!!

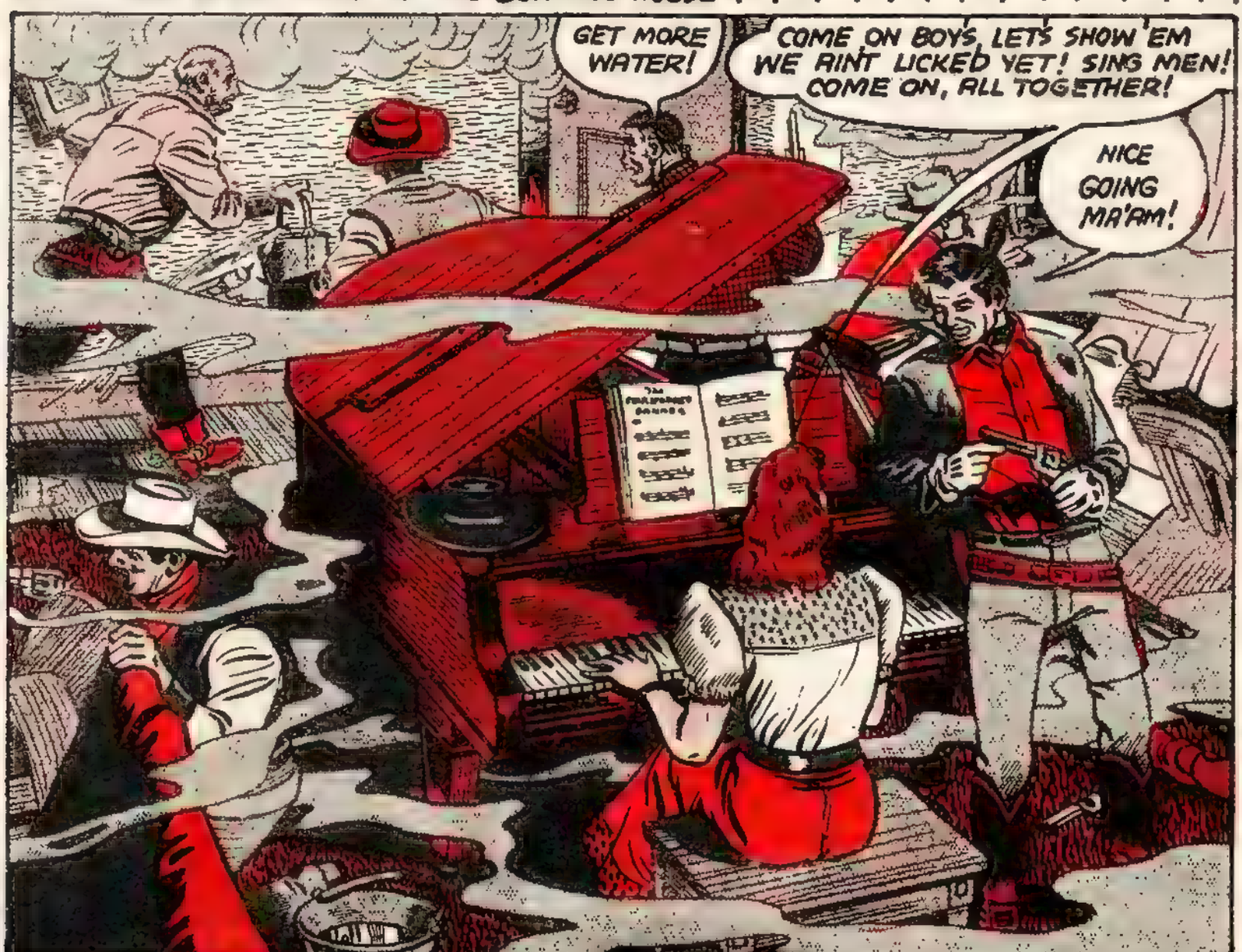
THIS IS A HOLDUP!
..OUCH!
..GOT HIM!
RUN! IT'S BILLY THE KID!
"FROM THE DERTH OF BRADY, BILLY THE KID LED THE MC SWEEN ARMY. AND BACKED BY HIS SIX-SHOOTERS HIS WILL WAS THE LAW OF THE LAND. AS HE RODE WITH HIS MEN PEOPLE RAN SCREAMING FROM HIS PATH." . . . . . .
WANTED
BILLY THE KID

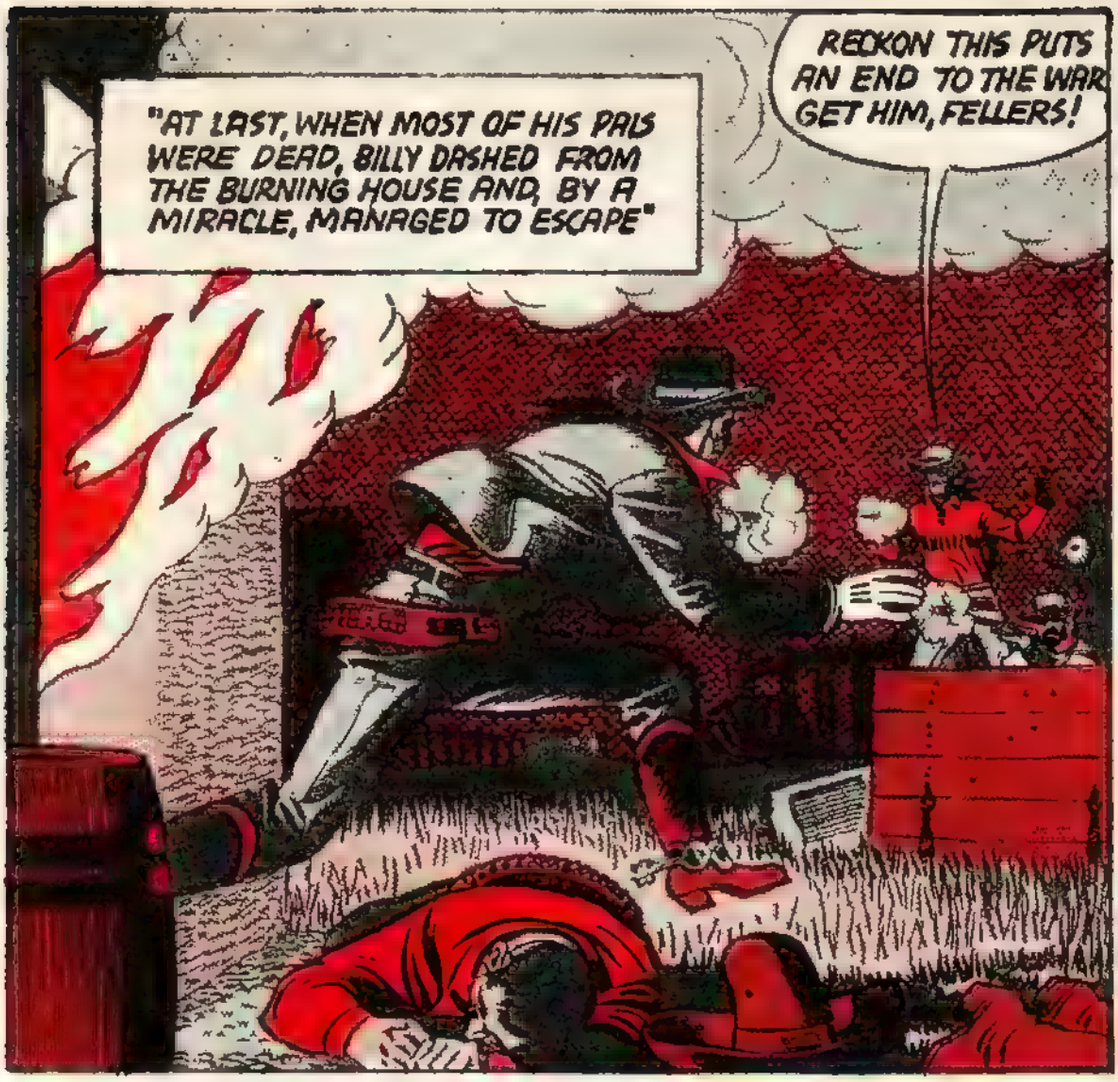
"A 'DEAD OR ALIVE' REWARD WAS OFFERED FOR BILLY THE KID AND, IN WASHINGTON, THE PRESIDENT WAS TOLD OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE LINCOLN COUNTY WAR. BUT BILLY WENT ON WITHOUT REGARD FOR LAW AND ORDER" . . . . . .

"BY THIS TIME THINGS HAD DEVELOPED INTO A PRIVATE WAR WAGED BY BILLY AND HIS MEN AND THE MURPHY GANG, MURPHY HIMSELF HAD BEEN RUINED AND DIED PENNILESS. THERE WAS A RUNNING FIGHT CLOSE TO CHISHUM'S SOUTH SPRING RANCH" . . . . . .



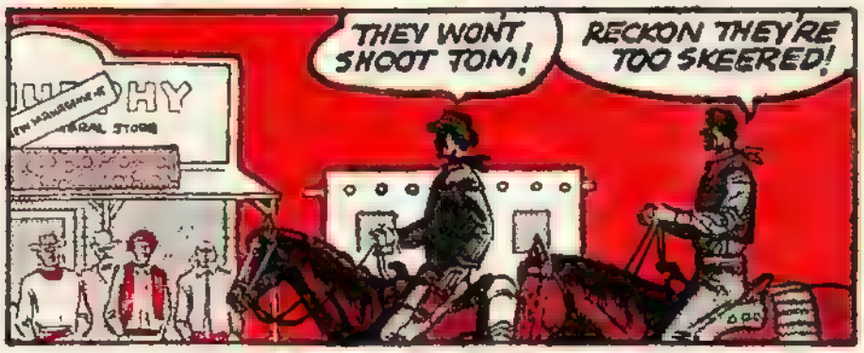
"RETURNING TO LINCOLN; BILLY WITH MC SWEEN AND A DOZEN OR MORE MEN, SHELTERED IN THE MC SWEEN HOUSE. MRS. MC SWEEN AND OTHER WOMEN WERE THERE..... SUDDENLY THE BUILDING WAS FIRED AND THE MILITARY WERE SENT FOR. COLONEL DUDLEY RODE INTO LINCOLN BUT REFUSED TO AID THE MC SWEEN MEN. MRS. MC SWEEN A VERY GALLANT WOMAN, TRIED TO HELP BILLY ROUSE HIS MEN TO FIGHT ON BY PLAYING HER THREATENED PIANO IN THE BURNING HOUSE". . . . . .



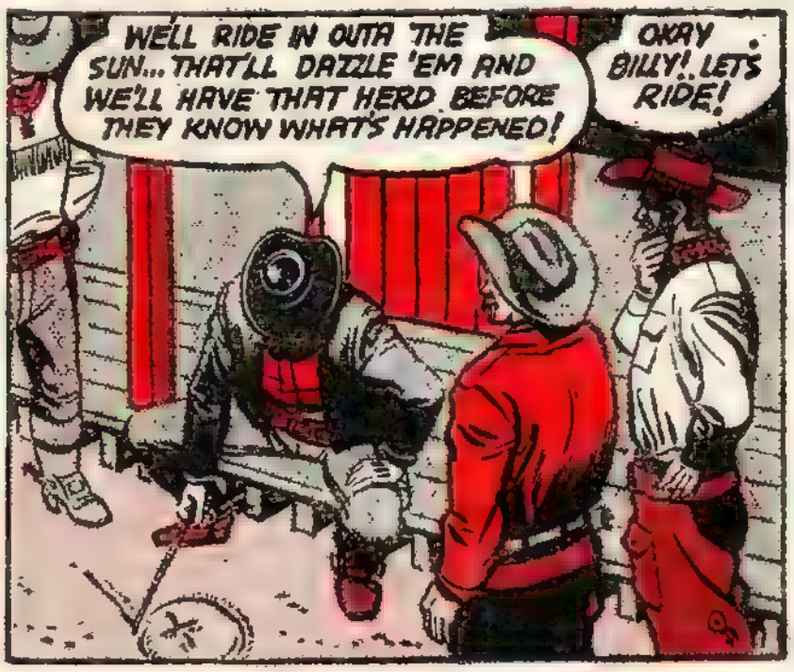

"AT LAST, WHEN MOST OF HIS PALS WERE DEAD, BILLY DASHED FROM THE BURNING HOUSE AND, BY A MIRACLE, MANAGED TO ESCAPE"
RECKON THIS PUTS AN END TO THE WAR GET HIM, FELLERS!

"WITH THE END OF THE GRIM BATTLE AN UNEASY PEACE SETTLED OVER LINCOLN COUNTY, BUT BILLY THE KID WAS STILL VERY MUCH ALIVE..... ONE DRY THE NEW GOVERNOR OF NEW MEXICO, AUTHOR LEW WALLACE OF "BEN-HUR" FAME, SENT FOR THE KID". . . . . .

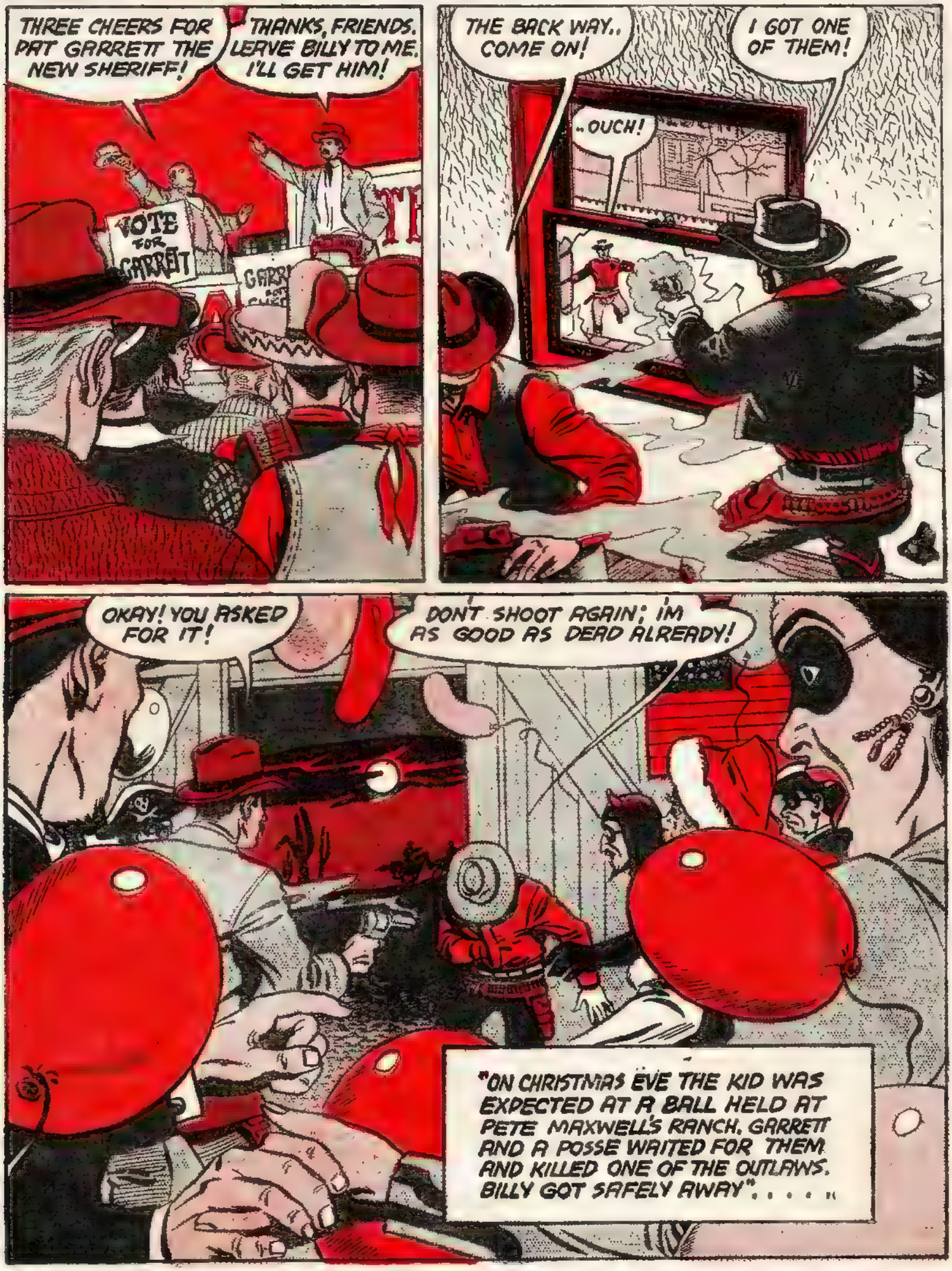
"THE GOVERNOR TRIED TO PERSUADE BILLY TO LIVE A NORMAL LIFE NOW THE CATTLE WAR WAS OVER, BUT THE KID SHOOK HIS HEAD BECAUSE HE KNEW THAT FROM NOW ON HE HAD TO LIVE PROTECTED BY HIS GUN. SO, WITH ONE OF HIS FRIENDS HE RODE OUT OF LINCOLN". . . .



"THEN AN OLD FRIEND OF BILLY'S CAME ON TO THE SCENE. THIS WAS THE FAMOUS PAT GARRETT WHO, ARRIVING FROM NOWHERE, GOT A JOB WITH A WEALTHY RANCHER BY THE NAME OF PETE MAXWELL"..., MEANWHILE BILLY THE KID BECAME AN OUT AND OUT BANDIT, MAKING A DISHONEST LIVING AS A RUSTLER. HE HAD HIS HEADQUARTERS AT FORT SUMNER" . . . . . .



"WITH BILLY RAMPAGING OVER ALL NEW MEXICO CHISHUM HAD PAT GARRETT, WHO HAD QUARRELLED WITH MAXWELL, ELECTED SHERIFF OF LINCOLN COUNTY. HIS JOB...TO GET BILLY THE KID. FROM THAT MOMENT IT WAS SHERIFF PAT GARRETT AGAINST BILLY THE KID AND WHEN GARRETT AND A POSSE WENT AFTER THE KID, BILLY KILLED A DEPUTY-SHERIFF NAMED CARLYLE" . . . . . .

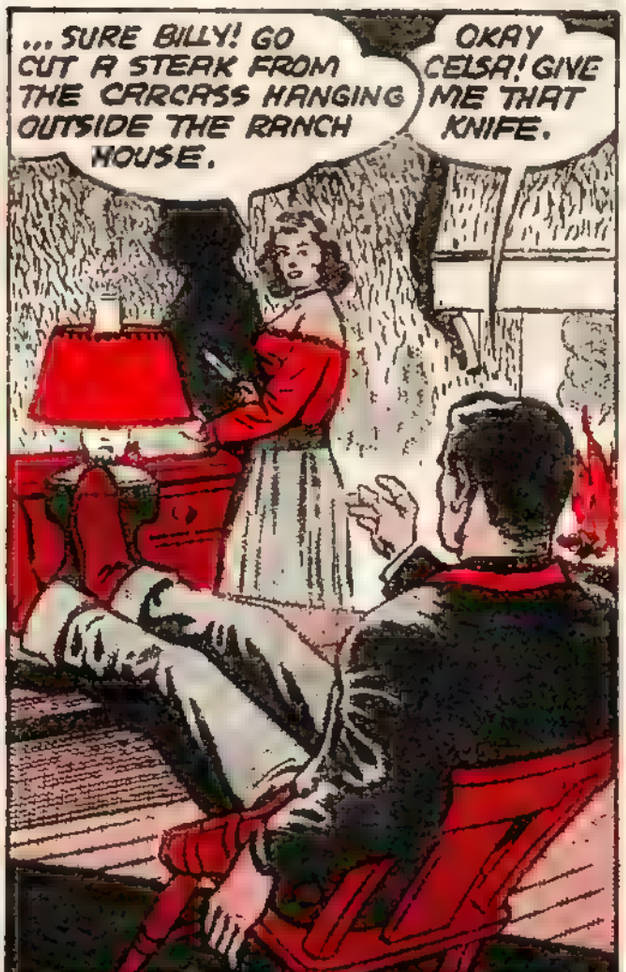

THREE CHEERS FOR PAT GARRETT THE NEW SHERIFF!
THANKS, FRIENDS. LEAVE BILLY TO ME. I'LL GET HIM!
VOTE FOR GARRETT
THE BACK WAY.. COME ON!
I GOT ONE OF THEM!
..OUCH!
OKAY! YOU ASKED FOR IT!
DON'T SHOOT AGAIN; I'M AS GOOD AS DEAD ALREADY!
"ON CHRISTMAS EVE THE KID WAS EXPECTED AT A BALL HELD AT PETE MAXWELL'S RANCH. GARRETT AND A POSSE WAITED FOR THEM AND KILLED ONE OF THE OUTLAWS. BILLY GOT SAFELY AWAY". . . .

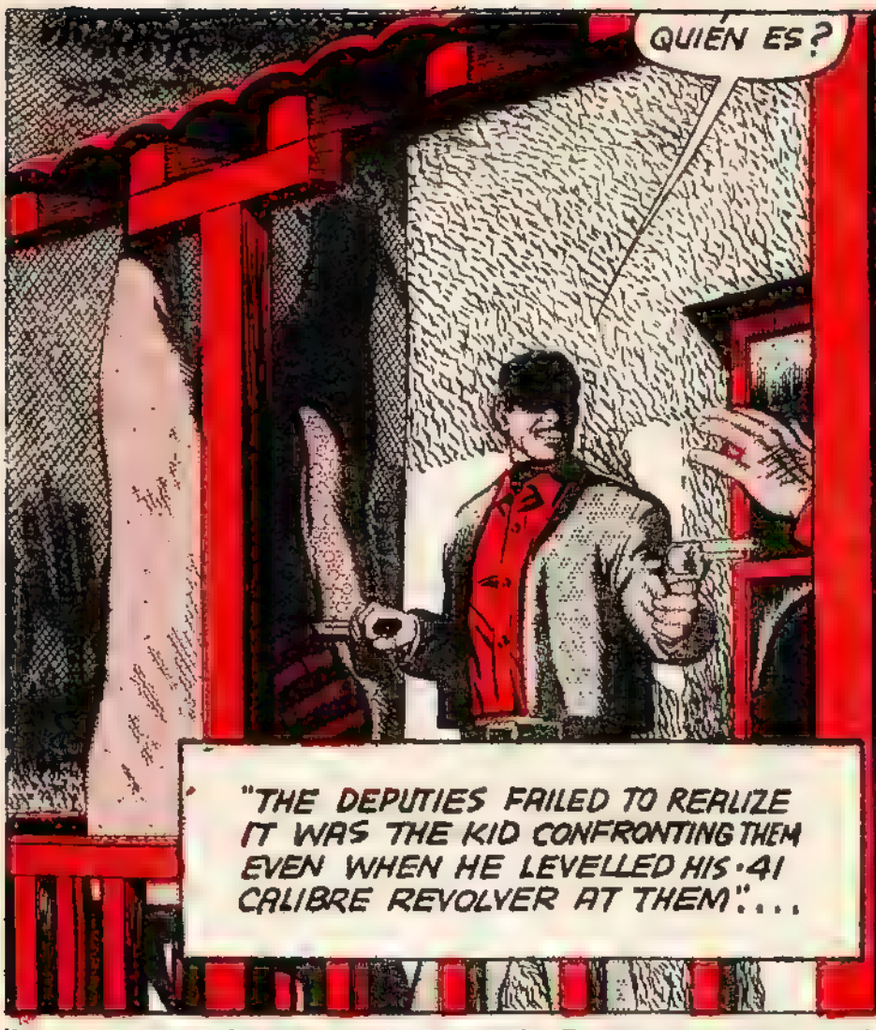
". . . . . EVENTURLLY HOWEVER, THE KID WAS CRUGHT AND TRIED - SENTENCED TO HANG HE SMILED AS HE WAS BEING SENTENCED TO DEATH". . . . . .
. . . MAY GOD HAVE MERCY ON YOUR SOUL!
"BUT BILLY MADE A LAST BID FOR FREEDOM. HE KILLED BOTH HIS JAILORS, ONE, BOB OLLINGER, BEING A MAN HE HATED MORE THAN ANY OTHER. . . . HE WAS ONLY JUST OVER TWENTY-ONE AT THIS TIME". . . .

"BILLY MADE HIS ESCAPE BUT THE END WAS IN SIGHT FOR THE OUTLAW". . . . . .

"LEARNING THE KID'S WHEREABOUTS, GARRETT AND TWO DEPUTIES RODE THROUGH THE DARKNESS AND TOOK UP POSITIONS OUTSIDE THE MAIN BUILDING OF MAXWELL'S RANCH..... LEAVING THE DEPUTIES ON THE VERANDAH, GARRETT CLIMBED SILENTLY THROUGH MAXWELL'S BEDROOM WINDOW AND AWAKENED THE SLEEPING MAN". . . .

"MEANWHILE, FIFTY FEET AWAY FROM THE RANCH HOUSE IN AN OUT BUILDING, BILLY, UNAWARE OF THE LAWMEN'S PRESENCE ASKS A MEXICAN FRIEND'S WIFE ABOUT PREPARING A MEAL". . . .




QUIÉN ES?
"THE DEPUTIES FAILED TO REALIZE IT WAS THE KID CONFRONTING THEM EVEN WHEN HE LEVELLED HIS .41 CALIBRE REVOLVER AT THEM"....

"INSIDE THE BEDROOM GRRRETT RECOGNISED THE KID'S VOICE AND MOTIONING TO PETE FOR SILENCE, WAITED WITH DRAWN GUN".

"BILLY MILDLY SUSPICIOUS SPOKE TO PETE: FROM THE DOORWAY OF THE BEDROOM".

* "WHO ARE THESE HOMBRES?.....

"INSIDE THE BEDROOM GARRETT CROUCHED BY THE BED"...
"... AND AS THE KID ENTERED THE ROOM.....!"
S'LONG KID! YOU SURE DIED GAME!
"SO BILLY THE KID, WHO HAD KILLED TWENTY-ONE MEN IN TWENTY-ONE YEARS AND WAS A GOOD FRIEND IF A BAD ENEMY, WAS LAID TO REST IN A SIMPLE GRAVE"...
"...TO-DAY THE TOWN OF FORT SUMNER HAS FALLEN INTO THE DUST AND NOT A BUILDING REMAINS, BUT THE KID'S GRAVE IS STILL VISIBLE AS A BARREN PLOT WHERE NO FLOWERS WILL GROW... IT IS KNOWN LOCALLY BY THE NAME OF 'HELLS HALF ACRE'"..

"GORDON!"

Tom Hall's voice rose and he struggled gamely through the thick undergrowth in the wake of Gordon Gregory, Dick Barrington and Harry Dalby.

The others stopped and waited for Tom to catch up with them. "This is awful," gasped the laggard. "I can't go another step without a rest. Besides," he added, squatting down on his heels in cowboy fashion. "I think you ought to tell us where we're going, what happened when you vanished ten minutes ago and—and a few more things." The speaker looked at Dick and Harry for confirmation and the other two Colden fellows nodded.

"He's right, Gordon," said Dick. "You whisked away from that camp pretty smartly, we've been blundering through this wilderness for goodness knows how long, and all we've got to go on is your casual remark that we're genuine pioneers. These togs are warm enough, it's true," the boy looked down at the soft, leather-fringed tunic and pants, "but it's jolly cold and my hands are frozen. How about building a fire and getting warmed up a bit?"

The ghostly schoolboy nodded slowly and appeared to be thinking deeply. He remained silent for nearly a minute, then he made a sweeping gesture. "O.K.," he said briskly, "we'll make camp here. I've been trying to get my bearings and I think I've got things straight at last. Get busy!"

Gratefully T., D. and H. built a fire, and over a satisfying meal of deermeat and some wild but juicy berries Gordon startled the three by saying: "We're in Kentucky, fellows, and it's early in the year 1779 . . ."

"What?" In chorus from Tom, Dick and Harry.

"*Seventeen* seventy-nine?" put in Dick.

"That's right," agreed Gordon. "I thought you'd like to see something of the very early days of American history, meet the famous Daniel Boone and take part in the siege of a frontier town and its fort. We're now about eight miles from Boonesborough, and great happenings are due to take place there in a few hours. Douse the fire, Dick, and we'll roll in our blankets for a few hours' sleep. We'll have to be away an hour before dawn. No!" he added sternly. "No more questions. You must trust me, as always, although I must repeat the warning that it is dangerous for you to expose yourselves to undue risks. I can never guarantee to get you safely back into your own period of history. Is that clear?"

The boys nodded.

"Right! Then let's get that sleep." And in less than a minute, as was his way, the strange ghostly fellow was rolled in his blanket and apparently fast asleep, although the boys knew that he rarely completely lost himself.

Before he, too, dropped off, Dick Barrington turned over in his mind the things he knew about Daniel Boone. He remembered that this pioneer and frontiersman had first penetrated into the wilderness of Kentucky, through the Cumberland Gap, in 1769; how his poor companions had been scalped by the Indians; how he had sent his brother Squire back to South Carolina for food and supplies; how he had lived alone in the woods, tasting neither bread nor salt for two years and how, in the end, he had been captured by a band of Indians, only to escape at the peril of his life.

"Dick!" came Harry's voice out of the darkness. "Isn't it true that Daniel Boone was adopted by an Indian chief named Black Fish as his son? I know I read something about it somewhere. Can *you* remember?"

"Jingo, yes!" whispered the other. "That *was* true. Boone and some companions were on their way to the Blue Licks to get salt when they were captured by Shawanoes, who had a French Canadian named Dequindre with them. Learning that the Shawanoes were on their way to attack Boonesborough, and knowing that most of the men were away hunting and that the place was almost completely defenceless, he pretended that he was ready to join the tribe and that his men would join as well. By this means he kept the Indians from moving on Boonesborough. What happened after that I don't know, except that he was adopted by Black Fish and renamed Big Turtle. He must have escaped, however, if he is defending his town now."

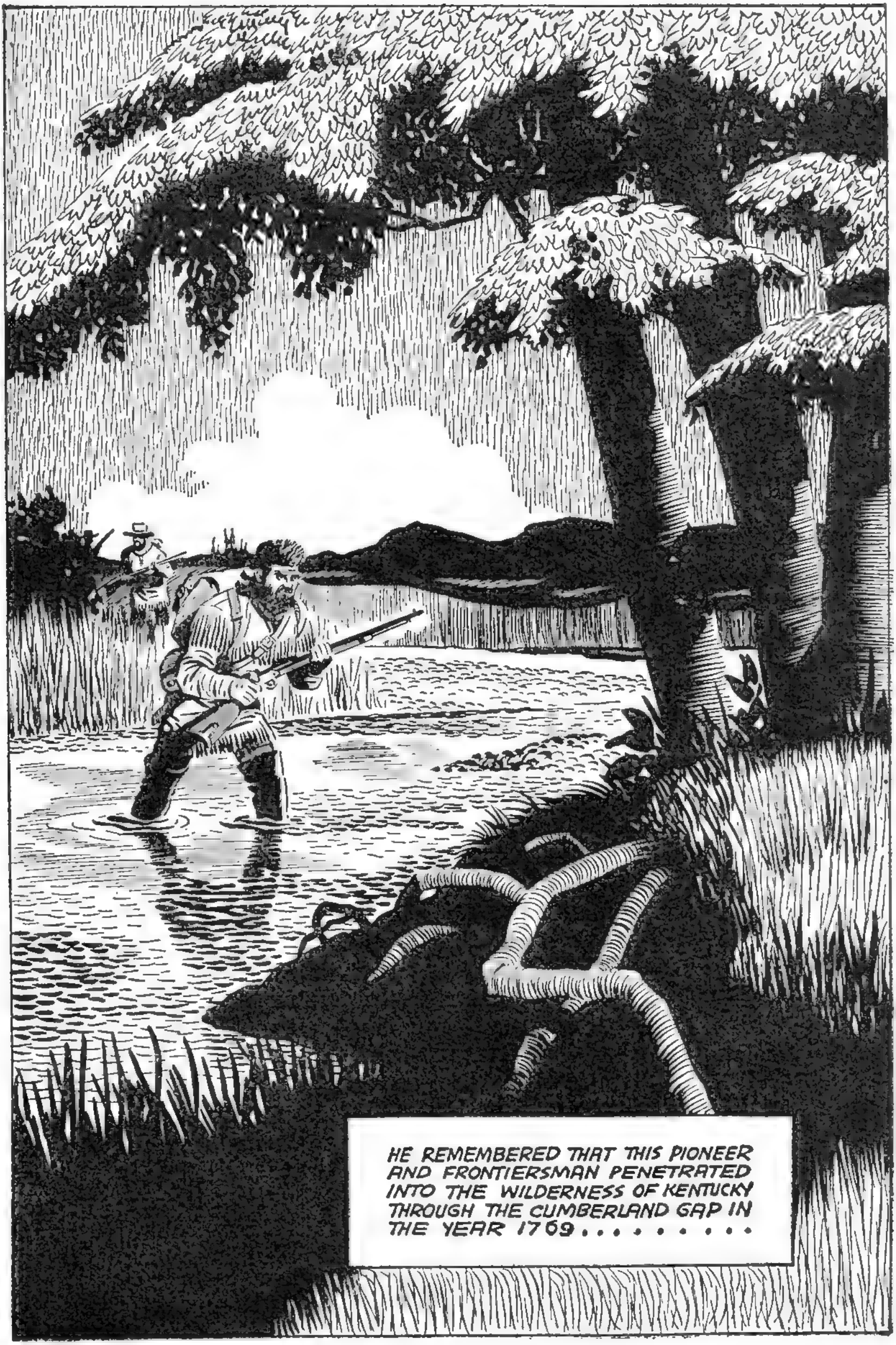
"He did!" came Gordon's voice. "Many of his companions came under the scalping knives of the Indians, but he was fairly well treated, and by pretending to be happy and quite content put Black Fish off his guard. One day the Indian took his eye off his 'son' and prisoner for a few moments to watch the passing of a flock of wild turkeys. When the turkeys had passed Boone had gone too, leaving no trace. He crossed the Ohio River and ran the one hundred and sixty miles to Boonesborough in four days. . . ."

"Four days?"

"No more, no less!" came Gordon's voice. "And, what's more, he had only one meal during that time, managing to shoot a buffalo at the Blue Licks. So now you know why he is at Boonesborough and why the town and its fort are managing to hold out. Daniel is in charge and that's good enough."

"But——" began Tom Hall.

"That's all, Tom," interrupted the ghostly schoolboy. "Go to sleep. I insist. We've


HE REMEMBERED THAT THIS PIONEER AND FRONTIERSMAN PENETRATED INTO THE WILDERNESS OF KENTUCKY THROUGH THE CUMBERLAND GAP IN THE YEAR 1769.....

work to do to-morrow. It may well prove to be the most exciting day you've had with me."

T., D. and H. were silent, knowing by the tone of their amazing friend's voice that it was time for them to do as they were told. So, as the four slept, eight miles away Black Fish, Dequindre and the one hundred and twenty Shawanoes posted their sentries as they waited for Boonesborough to fall and history to be made in Kentucky and, indeed, in the whole Northwestern territories.

It was still dark when the four pushed on, and after a hard journey through thick undergrowth Gordon halted and motioned to his companions to crouch under cover. In the silence they heard an occasional shot, the wild whoops of painted savages on the warpath and, every now and again, an order shouted in French.

"Dick!" Gordon flung the name over his shoulder. "Come with me! Keep your Winchester at the ready but try not to let it be seen and don't use it unless it is to save your life. Remember that it will be years before such a rifle is known to the world. Tom and Harry, you stay where you are and don't move a yard. Understand?"

"But——?" began Harry Dalby.

"Do as I tell you!" came sharply from Gordon.

"O.K. Sorry!" The Colden College fellow sighed. "We won't move."

A minute later Gordon and Dick Barrington slid through the undergrowth, and when Gordon finally stopped and parted the bushes in front of him, his companion saw that they were practically on top of a group of Indian warriors, dominated by a chief in full war-paint, and with a man who was obviously white talking earnestly to them in the Shawanoe tongue.

For three or four minutes the watchers remained silent; then Gordon began to move slowly backwards and Dick did the same. One glance the Colden fellow had of Gordon's face told him that the latter had overheard something pretty serious. Slowly, foot by foot and yard by yard, the two retreated until it was safe for them to rise to their feet and then, bent almost double, to race back to where Tom and Harry were still waiting.

"No!" snapped Gordon. "No questions. Follow me." He raised an imperious hand. "No matter what you see, fellows, don't move and don't fire unless I tell you. I've been interested in this slice of history for a heck of a time, and now that I know about it I don't want any trouble." Beads of perspiration had gathered on the speaker's forehead and T., D. and H. knew from past experience that their strange friend was under a very great strain. "We mustn't be seen, chaps," continued the ghostly schoolboy. "If we are, then it's on the cards that you'll never get back to the twentieth century. I'm not fooling!"

"Don't worry," said Dick. "We'll do as you say."

For a moment Gordon hesitated and, had they but known it, the three boys were within an ace of missing a truly great adventure as Gordon Gregory debated whether to whisk them into another, safer, period of history or not. Fortunately for the three adventurous spirits from Colden College, however, Gordon Gregory decided to carry on at that period in history and to witness the dramatic events of the next few hours.

"O.K.!" said the strange fellow. "Let's go." He looked around him. "We strike due east for a bit and then we'll hit a narrow trail. Within half an hour we should be near a clearing facing Boonesborough Fort. All ready?"

T., D. and H. nodded.

"Good!" Gordon spun the chamber of his latest-pattern Winchester repeater and

then moved silently in the lead, not a single twig snapping in his path and his Indian-made shoes making no sound as he walked. The hearts of Tom, Dick and Harry beat rapidly as they followed; expecting to have a rather boring time in modern America on this trip, they had not yet got over the shock of this dramatic encounter with their old friend at Coyote Creek, and now, with the prospect of a super fight with war-maddened Indians in front of them, they felt as if every nerve in their bodies was as taut as a violin string, and their muscles tensed as they followed in Gordon's wake.

"Down!" The word was a sharp whisper and just in time T., D. and H. dropped to the ground and held their breath as there was a movement among the undergrowth close by. Dick lifted his head an inch or so and saw the heads of five or six Indians in the pale morning light. Somewhere a twig snapped and one of the warriors stopped and turned his head. Dick waited with bated breath and idly wondered how Gordon would deal with the situation. Luckily the Indian seemed reassured and the small party passed on.

"Stay there!" hissed the leader of the party of boys. "I must do something about those red men." And before Dick or his companions could say a word, Gordon Gregory vanished like a puff of smoke. One—two—three minutes passed. Then came several sharp cracks from old-time flintlocks, the high-pitched scream of a wounded Indian and then a ragged cheer. Like a shadow Gordon was back again, crouching by Dick Barrington. "Don't stir!" he hissed. "One movement and these woods will mark your graves. Gosh!" The speaker seemed to be talking to himself. "I'll never forgive myself if—— Aaah!" He broke off and his hands pressed the heads of Tom Hall and Dick Barrington into the soft earth. Then through the brushwood blundered four of the Indians. They passed within a foot or two of the concealed boys and were gone!

"Thank goodness!" Gordon released his hands from his companions' necks. "That was close. It looks as if they hoped to set fire to the fort by approaching from the west. Gosh! I'm exhausted after all that. You know, fellows, this business gets harder and harder for me to do."

The boys said nothing, and in that they were wise.

Within another few minutes they had all pressed on, and when it was quite light, although the sun was obscured by thick cloud, they reached the edge of the clearing and peered through the bushes. To the right was the fort defending Boonesborough, its tall, stoutly made gate firmly closed, and to the left the four watchers saw several Indians advancing through the undergrowth. The leading man carried a flag of truce, and Dick gasped as he saw that he was a white man—it was the infamous French Canadian, Dequindre!

"Halt!"

The one word came from the fort.

Instantly the military genius of the Shawanoes raised a hand and his companions melted into the bushes once more.

"We desire a parley!" called out the Canadian. "Are you there, Boone?"

Tom Hall clutched Harry Dalby's wrist. At last they were to see the most famous American pioneer of the West who ever lived. Daniel Boone, who had lived in the wilds since he had come from his birthplace of Pennsylvania at the age of 13, appeared in full view of the Indians from a ledge running along the stockade. He held an old-fashioned flintlock in his hands, and his voice was quite steady as he spoke.

"What have you to say, Monsieur?" he asked.

"Only this," came the reply. "My orders from Hamilton are to protect the lives of the Americans in Boonesborough. So I ask that you and some companions should come out for a parley. For the sake of humanity and the welfare of the white men in Kentucky and elsewhere in the Northwest, I am willing that we should end this siege and each enjoy the honours of war. Will you come? You have my word, the word of a white man, that you will not be harmed. What do you say?"

"Wait!" Daniel Boone shouted the one word and then vanished from sight.

"Who's Hamilton?" asked Dick in a fierce whisper.

"Governor of the British territories," came the reply. "I forgot to tell you that the Shawanoes are supposed to be fighting for the British. The man Dequindre is only out for what he can get for himself, of course; that's obvious. I think—— Ssssst!" Gordon held up a warning finger. "Boone's coming back."

"Well?" called out the French Canadian. "I cannot keep Black Fish and his men quiet much longer."

"I will come," rang out the voice of Daniel Boone. "I shall meet my father and you in one hour. I am bringing eight companions and——"

"No!" cried a voice from behind the stockade. "Don't be a fool, Dan'l, them painted varmints ain't to be trusted. Come down, man, and we'll drive 'em off before sunset."

The leader of the defenders of Boonesborough turned to shake a silencing finger. "You are wrong, Calloway," the boys heard him say. "Dequindre is, after all, a white man and I am Black Fish's adopted son. In one hour, Monsieur!" he added loudly. "And may God guide our deliberations for the sake of humanity and the welfare of all settlers in Kentucky."

"You will come without arms?" cried the Canadian.

"We come in parley!" rapped out the stern voice of Daniel Boone. Then he vanished behind the stockade as Dequindre turned and disappeared into the undergrowth.

"What happens now?" whispered Dick. "How can we be close to them when the pow-wow is held?"

Gordon considered. "You see that group of trees over there?" he asked, pointing.

The others nodded.

"The parley will be held close to them," went on Gordon Gregory. "If we move swiftly and silently we can gain shelter within easy earshot, but again I must warn you not to do anything unless I give you leave."

The three boys nodded. "Let's get on," begged Tom Hall. "I wouldn't miss this for anything you could name, Gordon. You lead and we'll stick as close as blood brothers, but for goodness' sake don't let's be late."

The strange schoolboy, who had given the three Colden fellows more understanding of the Western States of America than had anyone else in the world, slowly nodded his head and once more led the little band through the dense brushwood. They proceeded with extreme caution, every now and again stopping to cock attentive ears to make certain that they were not being stalked, and slowly but surely they drew closer to the small clearing that Gordon had said would be the place where the parley would be held. Twice the ghostly fellow went forward to make certain that they were not walking into an ambush, and during those two brief absences Tom, Dick and Harry waited with fast-beating hearts.

"Supposing something goes wrong?" whispered Tom, when Gordon was away the second time. "I know Gordon doesn't feel so good about things. I can always tell when he is at ease and when he isn't."

"Don't keep worrying," laughed Dick. "He won't let us down, although I reckon we'd better see that he takes things easily after we get away from here. We'll suggest a quiet camp and some yarning, eh?"

"Humph!" grunted Harry. "That sounds a fine idea, but we've got to get away first. Where *is* Gordon? He's been gone a heck of a time. Ah!" The speaker sighed with relief. "Here he is!"

"O.K.," snapped the returning Gordon Gregory. "The trail is quite clear."

Swiftly the little band of fellows continued on their way and, at last, lay well concealed behind a screen of bushes that faced a circular clearing near the group of trees that the leader of the boys had pointed out. Sitting upright, and in full-feathered headdress, was Black Fish, and grouped in a semicircle were about twenty Shawanoes, their faces hideously streaked with warpaint and their throats decorated with necklaces made up, for the most part, of human teeth.

Gordon translated as Black Fish spoke.

"Boone has left the fort," he whispered. "Remember, now, no move unless I say so." And the speaker looked steadily in Harry Dalby's direction.

The seconds ticked by until, quite suddenly, the French Canadian appeared, with Daniel Boone and eight companions behind him. Instantly Black Fish rose, came forward and greeted his adopted son with a great show of affection. "Black Fish loved Big Turtle," whispered Gordon, "and I rather fancy Boone would not have been in such a hurry to escape if it hadn't been for Dequindre and the British troops. He was happy enough with his Indian father except for his fear for the safety of the people of Boonesborough. However, we mustn't talk any more. The parley is beginning. Watch, and also keep your ears open. You'll be able to learn something from Dequindre's French and his broken English, and some of the Indians speak a little English too." He grinned. "They are rather like children in many ways and like to show off what knowledge they have."

The pow-wow took the form such meetings usually took at that period. There was much talking all round a subject, little agreements after a great deal of discussion but, let it be added, no going back on any point agreed to.

Tom, Dick and Harry had pins and needles before a sudden movement showed that full agreement had been reached.

"Now for it!" hissed Gordon Gregory.

"The Great Spirit smiles upon us, my son!" Black Fish was saying. "Hold!" He stood upright and raised a hand, palm outwards, over his head. Instantly silence settled over the meeting. "We must all shake hands to show that we are friends, that fighting is over between us and that we will henceforth live in peace one with the other."

Quickly and in a voice that was a mere trickle of words Gordon translated.

"But——" began Tom.

"Ssssst!" Dick clutched his friend's arm. "Not a sound."

"That is well, O my father!" came Daniel Boone's voice. "And first I shake the hand that adopted me and bound me close in blood ties as between a true father and son." And the frontiersman's hand shot out.

"Hold!" cried Black Fish again. "We are too many and you are too few. Two of us shall shake hands with one of you, O son of mine! You know that that is the custom?"

Gordon sensed rather than saw the movement among his companions. "Steady!" he hissed. "Steady, for goodness' sake. Watch me and take your time from what I do."

Daniel Boone seemed to hesitate, but, after a glance into the eager, smiling faces of the men he had lived with for many, many months, he nodded agreement and the handshaking commenced. The watching boys, amazed that Boone and his companions could be so trusting, saw the hands of each white man gripped by two Indians. For several seconds, the longest seconds that Tom, Dick and Harry had ever known, those hands were grasped. Then it happened—then the great act of cold-blooded treachery was put into effect. Powerless to defend themselves, the white men were being dragged into the mass of tangled undergrowth.

In the desperate scuffling that followed Harry Dalby threw caution to the winds. He could have stood by and watched had it been a fair fight—but treachery, in white man or in Indian, was something he couldn't stand. Before Gordon or the other two knew what had happened, there was Harry in the open, yelling a warning and tugging at a hunting-knife in his belt. Out of the corner of his eye Dick Barrington saw an Indian brave raise a razor-edged tomahawk and whirl it over his head.

Crack! A rifle spoke and the Indian died.

"Get busy!" screamed Gordon. "Get Harry out of there!" And, howling like a dozen Indians, he led the way to the rescue of the foolhardy, but surely excusably so, Harry Dalby.

Then began a desperate fight at close quarters, and Dick Barrington saw that, by the active use of their feet and by butting with their heads, the Boonesborough men had managed to tear themselves free from the clutches of those hands of death and were racing for safety back to the fort. The Indians gave chase, only to run slap into a murderous fire from the defenders of the fort as they reached the open.

"*Run!*" roared Calloway from the top of the stockade.

Daniel Boone swerved as he raced across the ground, and Dick Barrington saw him fling an encircling arm about a companion's waist and literally lift him up and carry him the last few yards to the gate of the stockade.

"*Open up!*" came Calloway's roar once more. "Count 'em as they come through. Nine it is—*Nine*!"

Slowly the gateway swung back and the tricked Boonesborough defenders raced through, with the disappointed, blood-curdling howls of the Indians echoing in their ears.

Thanks to Gordon Gregory, who had used his special powers to get Tom, Dick *and* Harry out of that clearing, the three Colden College adventurers did not share in that running fight across the wide clearing in front of the fort. Instead they were stumbling through the brushwood, thorns tearing at their hands and legs, towards safety.

"*Now!*" yelled Gordon at last.

They all stopped, and a moment later the earth rocked, there was a high-pitched whine in the ears of Tom, Dick and Harry, and Kentucky of 1779 receded into the past.

. . . . . .

"Gordon!" Dick Barrington opened his eyes and looked about him at the completely changed countryside. "Where are you? Jumping rattlers, you chaps, he's gone this time. You *are* an ass, Harry. Whatever made you jump into that clearing like that? You heard what Gordon had said half a dozen times."

"I'm sorry, Dick," came the shamefaced reply. "Honestly, I am sorry, but it was

that treachery that did it. I've always defended the Indians, as you know, and I suppose seeing them do such a thing shocked me so much that I—I—well, I did what I did. If ever I *do* see Gordon again, then, of course, I shall take all the blame and beg him——"

"Save your breath, Harry," came Gordon's voice. "I was really to blame. I had no business to have taken you into that, but——" He shrugged. "All's well that ends well, eh? We're safe and ready for more fun."

"Rather!" chorused the three.

"Are you all right?" added Dick. "And what happened—er—after we left? At Boonesborough, I mean!"

"Questions answered in that order," said Gordon with a smile. "Yes, I am quite all right and rather proud of what I managed to do on that trip. As for what happened at Boonesborough, the white defenders of the fort finally managed to drive off Black Fish and his men. There *was* an attempt to mine the fort, but it was a dismal failure and the enemy eventually withdrew and left Daniel Boone to earn the thanks of his comrades."

Dick sighed. "I'm glad to hear that," he said, "and when I get home I'm going to find all the books I can about Daniel Boone, and not look up once until I've read every single page of the lot of them."

The ghostly schoolboy laughed.

"You'd have a job, Dick," he said. "There are dozens of books about Daniel Boone, not to mention those about his brothers—all except the ones who were scalped —and his sons. Anyway, let's get a camp fixed up, eh?"

And, yawningly, Tom Hall, Dick Barrington and Harry Dalby agreed that the sooner they were comfortably settled in a real camp the happier and more contented they would feel. Yes, just for once, they'd had enough excitement to last them for a little while.

Cannonball Green
E
THANKS TO GORDON T.D. AND H. FOUND THEMSELVES TAKING THE STAGE FOR KINGHAM, KANSAS. . . . . .
THAT'S GREEN ON THE BOX FELLOWS THEY CALL HIM CANNONBALL GREEN!
WHY?
OVERLAND STAGE
NOW YOU SEE WHY THEY CALL HIM CANNONBALL GREEN TOM?
YOU BET!
PHEW! THIS IS FAST DRIVING IF YOU LIKE!

GEE! THAT'S SOMETHING LIKE SPEED!
OVERLAND STAGE
AT THE FIRST HALT CANNONBALL MADE GOOD HIS BOAST THAT HE AND HIS MEN COULD CHANGE HIS TEAM FASTER THAN A MAN TOOK TO WALK AROUND THE COACH...
HEY! CANNONBALL, BETTER WATCH OUT. TRIGGER JEFF'S ON THE RAMPAGE!
OKAY, BILL, I'LL KEEP MY EYES PEELED!
LOOK OUT YOU'LL HAVE US OVER CANNONBALL!
RELAX, MISTER WE AIN'T MOVIN' YET!

MEANWHILE, SEVERAL MILES ALONG THE TRAIL, TRIGGER JEFF AND HIS COHORTS PREPARE TO HOLD UP THE STAGE-COACH WHICH CARRIES GOLD AND OTHER VALUABLES.
RECKON WE'VE TWENTY MINUTES TO WAIT FELLERS!
HEY! SLOW UP CANNONBALL!
NOT ON YOUR LIFE JIM! THIS STAGE DON'T STOP FER NOTHIN'!
OVERLA
GIT UP, THARE, YA LAZY CRITTERS!
IT'S A HOLD-UP, GORDON!
LEAVE IT TO CANNONBALL!
OVERLAND STAGE

GIDDUP, THERE!
WERE NEARLY OVER....!
GET READY TO JUMP, FELLOWS!
WHAT KIND OF A TRIP CANNONBALL?
HECK! NOT SO GOOD. RECKON I'M A MINUTE LATE!
THANKS TO THE SKILL OF GREEN DISASTER WAS AVOIDED AND THE HOLD-UP WAS A DISMAL FAILURE
YIPPPEEEEE!

THAT'S A SWELL POST-OFFICE, CANNONBALL, HOW COME YOU GOT IT?

ITS QUITE A STORY.

GREEN

TAKING COFFEE WITH THE STAGECOACH DRIVER THE BOYS GOT TO TALKING ABOUT GREENSBURG . . . . . .

"IT HAPPENED THIS WAY" DRAWLED CANNONBALL GREEN. "ONE DAY I GOT INTO TOWN . . . . . ."

HEY, CANNONBALL, HOW'S ABOUT GETTIN' OURSELVES A POST-OFFICE, HUH?

I RECKON I KNOW WHERE THERE IS ONE!

". . . . SOME FELLOWS SUGGESTED WE KINDA BORROWED THE POST-OFFICE AT JAYNES-VILLE, SO THAT NIGHT . . . . . "

". . . . . WE DROVE TO JAYNESVILLE, ABOUT TWO MILES AWAY, AND LOADED THE POST-OFFICE ONTO THE OX-WAGGON . . . . . "

FELLERS SHOULDN'T SLEEP S' DURNED HEAVY!

SERVES 'EM RIGHT FER NOT LOOKING AFTER THEIR POST-OFFICE!

JAYNESVILLE

POST OFFICE

IT'S SURE SWELL CANNONBALL!
BEST CHANGE THE NAME, HUH?
OFFICE
YEP! WE STUCK TO THAT POST OFFICE AN' I RECKON THE TOWN'S BOOMIN' RIGHT NOW!
I'LL NEVER FORGET THAT RIDE MISTER!
IT'S BEEN GRAND MEETIN' YOU CANNONBALL!
CANNONBALL GREEN'S NAME STILL LIVES, FELLOWS. ROUTE 54 OF THE UNITED STATES IS STILL CALLED CANNONBALL HIGHWAY. THAT IS OF COURSE IN THE 1950's!
TOMBSTO
SO TOM, DICK AND HARRY WITH GORDON GREGORY RODE OUT OF GREENSBURG AND HIT THE TRAIL FOR TOMBSTONE....

GORDON GREGORY reined in his mount and waited for Tom, Dick and Harry to overhaul him.

"Listen, fellows," he drawled, as he dismounted to tighten the girths of his pony. "We'll be at Tombstone in half an hour or so and I'd just like to say——"

"We know!" chorused the three Colden boys.

"Take a lead from you!" added Tom Hall with a laugh. "Don't worry, Gordon, we all three know something of Tombstone's history, and if it's as tough as we've heard, then I for one will keep well in the background."

"It's tougher," grunted Gordon. "It's the wickedest town in the whole durned West right at this minute. However, let's get going!" And the speaker swung himself into the saddle, grinned round at his companions and shook the reins on his pony's neck. A moment later all four rode abreast along the trail, scarves knotted about their throats to absorb the perspiration that streamed down their faces. Only Gordon seemed to be cool but, as T., D. and H. well knew, their friend was different from anyone else in the entire world—a person of the world and yet not belonging to it.

"Reckon it was a sorry day for lots of folk when Ed Schieffelin located his silver mine round about eight years ago, fellows!" remarked Gordon. "It was right over there——" He pointed to some bleak, rocky slopes shimmering in the intense Arizona heat. "Ed promptly named it 'The Lucky Cuss' because his brother Al slapped him on the back and yelled: 'Gee, you're a lucky cuss, Ed!' It wasn't long, however, before the whole mushroom-like township became known as Tombstone, and a gigantic tombstone it has become to quite a number of *un*lucky guys."

"When did Ed actually discover his mine?" asked Dick.

"April 1879," came the drawling reply. "And in a couple of years Tombstone was the Mecca for every gun-slinging badman on the frontier from Dodge City clean to Lincoln County. For years things boomed right here, but about a year ago the mine-shafts were flooded, work in most of the mines was abandoned and now the city exists merely to shelter all the riff-raff of the West. When we ride into Tombstone we'll be rubbing shoulders with cattle rustlers, horse thieves, crooked gamblers, stage and train robbers and killers of every kind. You know, fellows, I still wonder why I'm letting you ride——"

"Stop, Gordon!" chorused Tom and Harry.

"Don't turn us back now, please!" begged Dick.

"O.K."—Gordon Gregory grinned at his companions—"but keep y'r eyes open, y'r mouths shut and y'r hands hovering a few inches above the butts of y'r ·45s. Ah!" He gave a sudden exclamation. "Here comes someone in an almighty hurry." The speaker reined in his pony as a cloud of dust came whirling along the trail towards them and proved to be a horse and rider. The newcomer swerved away from the four boys, but Gordon's Colt appeared like magic in his right hand.

"Hold!" he bawled, and there was no mistaking the note of command in his voice. "Just a moment, stranger. We'd like a word with you." He touched his pony's flanks with his spurs and, with T., D. and H. close behind him, rode towards the now stationary horseman. "What's the hurry, Mister? We're aiming to ride into Tombstone, and as you seem to be breaking all records getting out of the town, I'd kind of like to know the reason. Care to do some talkin', feller?"

The man spat into the dust.

"Sure," he said. "They've made John Slaughter sheriff of Cochise County, and back in Tombstone he's gunnin' for every guy whose face ain't known sheer along the frontier. Reckon I'm strange to this neck of the woods and that means I'm likely to come under the sheriff's suspicions, and——" A rather weak grin spread over the speaker's face. "Waal, I guess it isn't altogether healthy for anyone Sheriff Slaughter happens to be suspicious of."

"What else?" snapped Gordon, his six-gun pointing straight at the other's heart.

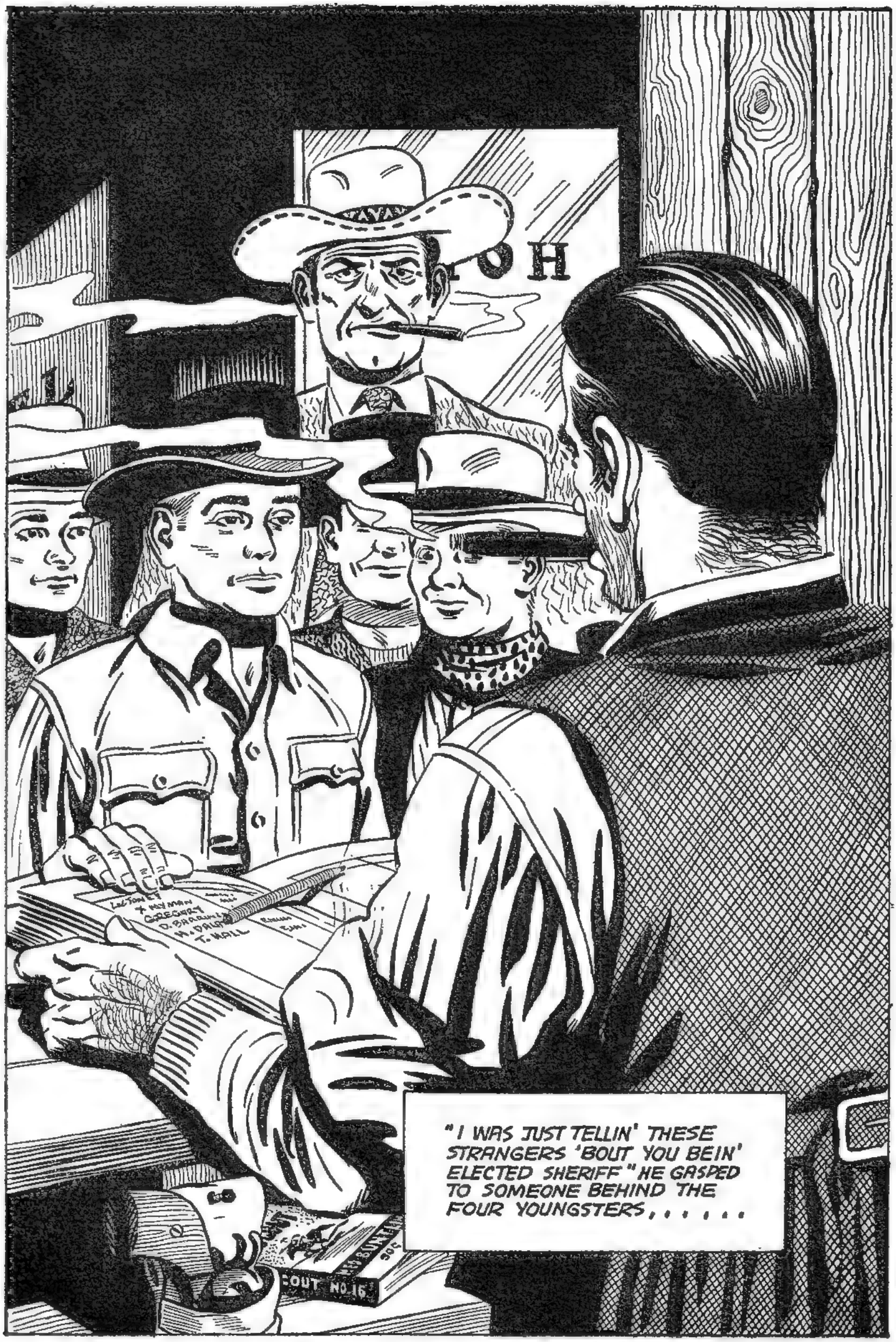
The man threw back his head and gave a harsh laugh. "Only that Black Mike Delaney aims to rob Cochise County of its new sheriff, that's all."

Gordon considered for a moment, then he gesticulated with his six-gun. "On y'r way, Mister," he said. "Reckon it isn't altogether healthy for Moe Kimber to stay in the same neighbourhood as Honest John Slaughter. I figure—— Reach for the sky, Moe!" Before the man's hand could reach his ·45, Gordon had pressed his own Colt hard against the other's side. "Yes, Moe," he said steadily. "I know you and if y'll take my advice y'll ride across the frontier to Dodge City and not come back. You can——" With a swift movement he lifted Moe Kimber's ·45 from its holster. "You can get another six-gun later. Get going!"

The man scowled, spat once more into the dust and then, whirling his mount, gave the creature its head and rode, lickety-spit, across the bleak, rocky terrain.

"Phew!" whistled Dick Barrington. "That was a narrow squeak, Gordon. What do you think made that fellow leave town? If he's a friend of this man Black Mike Delaney, why didn't he stay to fight with him?"

The other fellow shrugged his shoulders. "Moe Kimber is a killer," he said slowly, "but there are quite a number of places where he's known as 'Gun-shy' Kimber, so maybe that's got something to do with it. Anyway," he added, as he thrust his Colt


"I WAS JUST TELLIN' THESE STRANGERS 'BOUT YOU BEIN' ELECTED SHERIFF" HE GASPED TO SOMEONE BEHIND THE FOUR YOUNGSTERS, ...

back into its holster, "we'd better get moving. It looks as if things are hotting up in Tombstone and we'll need to watch our step more than ever."

"Who's John Slaughter?" asked Tom, as they all started along the trail again.

Gordon grinned. "He's one heck of a fellow," he drawled. "Wears a white Stetson hat, tooled leather boots, a fancy waistcoat and a pearl-handled six-gun that swings low on his right hip. Yes, and you'll rarely find him without a black cigar tucked into the corner of his mouth."

"A dude?" commented Harry Dalby.

"Yes," agreed Gordon slowly, "but the quickest guy on the draw I've ever met. They say that John Slaughter lives up to his name and is inclined to shoot first and yell: 'It's the law!' after he's pulled the trigger, not before. He's something of a detective, too, I reckon. There was a time when he caught a killer because the stupid fellow swore he hadn't used his gun for days. Honest John grabbed that gun, squinted through the barrel and promptly arrested the man. That barrel showed that the gun had been fired less than twelve hours before.

"John has been an Indian fighter," went on Gordon, "then Texas Ranger, and last time I heard of him he was a wealthy cattleman and respected rancher. Things must be pretty bad in Tombstone if they've elected him sheriff. It means that Tombstone's on its way to being cleaned up. However, that's enough talking, fellows, the township's just around that bend ahead."

Ten minutes later the four rode into the main street of the place that even Wyatt, Virgil and Morgan Earp had failed to clean up. To the left, as they rode in, Tom, Dick and Harry caught a glimpse of the fertile valleys beyond, valleys that bred cattle on the lush, belly-deep gamma grass, cattle that were so often rustled by the badmen of Tombstone.

Loungers eyed the newcomers as they dismounted outside a frame-hotel badly in need of repair, and out of the corner of his eye Dick Barrington saw a little bow-legged man scuttle off in the direction of the shack that housed the offices of the Tombstone *Epitaph*.

"O.K., fellows," he said easily. "Let's see about rooms," and he led the way into the hotel.

"Stayin' long, Mister?" asked the hotel proprietor, shifting a cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other.

"Maybe—maybe not!" came Gordon's reply.

The man met the other's eyes and his own dropped under that steady gaze. "O.K., Mister," he almost whined. "Ain't no need to get thataway; it's just that this ain't 'xactly a healthy town for strangers and I figured on givin' you a word of warnin'. Just got ourselves a new sheriff—Honest John Slaughter's the name—and you——" The speaker's eyes widened, his jaw dropped and the cigar fell on to the dirty counter in front of him. "I was just tellin' these strangers 'bout you being elected sheriff!" he gasped to someone behind the four youngsters.

Four heads turned and Tom Hall gave a long, low whistle as he looked into the stern face of John Slaughter.

"Stap me!" cried the new sheriff suddenly, his whole face lighting up. "It's Gordon Gregory. How do, lad? What brings you to Tombstone?"

The two shook hands and, as the party moved away from the counter, Gordon made the necessary introductions. For a few minutes they chatted of this and that, then the sheriff bent towards the boys' companion. "Best not stay too long, Gordon," he growled. "I'm aimin' to settle accounts with a few fellows in this township. One in particular."

FEED
...EVERY NOW AND AGAIN THERE CAME THE CRASH OF A SIXGUN LET OFF BY SOME TRIGGER-HAPPY GALOOT WITH LESS REGARD FOR HIS LIFE THAN WAS HEALTHY FOR HIM . . . . . .

"Name of Black Mike Delaney, huh?" grunted Gordon.

The sheriff nodded. "Reckon you know everything," he drawled, "but, take a tip, fellow, and get out of town pronto. Savvy?" He jerked his head in the direction of Tom, Dick and Harry. "Them youngsters you've brought along might run into a peck of real trouble."

Gordon Gregory laughed lightly. "I'll look after them, John," he answered, "and, if you don't mind, I think we'll stick around awhile. Maybe we'll hit the trail to-morrow, maybe we'll stay a little longer. By the way, you might like to know that 'Gun-shy' Kimber pulled out of town about an hour ago. Headin' for Dodge City without his six-gun, last time I saw him."

The lawman of Tombstone and Cochise County slapped his thigh. "I've got to hand it to you, Gordon," he declared. He scratched the side of his chin. "I'll confess I wasn't so sure of Kimber. Reckoned he had more guts than has proved to be the case. This town will be that much better without him. How's about a drink over at the Oriental, huh?"

Gordon shook his head.

"Sorry." John Slaughter laughed. "I was forgetting. Waal! S'long. I'll be seeing you, huh?"

"Sure!" came the reply from Gordon. He waved airily and then, returning to the dirty counter, registered and took possession of the keys to two rooms on the first floor of that ramshackle building.

Tom, Dick and Harry spent the remainder of that day, and some hours of the night, with their mouths permanently open. After dark things livened up. Saloons and dance halls were a blaze of light; girls in frilly dresses shrieked their heads off as they entertained rough, bearded men from the mines that were still being operated, cowhands, thieves, killers, gamblers and all the riff-raff of Tombstone; every now and again there came the crash of a six-gun let off by some trigger-happy galoot with less regard for his life than was healthy for him, and added to the general din the newcomers occasionally heard the thunder of horses' hoofs and glimpsed men riding hell-for-leather out of town either in chase or being chased.

Of Sheriff John Slaughter, however, none of the four had so much as a peek. It was as if he had been swallowed up in the noise and garishness of the wickedest town in the West.

"Where do you reckon he is?" Tom asked Gordon, as the four managed to wedge themselves into an obscure corner of the Oriental Saloon, out of sight of most of the patrons of the place. "Surely he won't stand by and see all this"—he made a sweeping movement with his arm—"going on without doing something about it?"

"Take it easy, Tom," said the other. "Cleaning up a plague-spot like Tombstone is a mighty ticklish business. A wise sheriff doesn't go around shooting off his gun at all and sundry. Most of the shooting and rowdyism we've heard and seen to-night is just ordinary horseplay. That cowhand, for instance——" He pointed towards a tall, lean individual with flaming red hair who had just lurched through the swing doors. "It's a cinch he'll get into a heap of trouble before morning. Ah!" With a sharp cry the speaker yelled: *"Down for y'r lives!"* and at the same moment disappeared under the table, followed a split second later by Tom, Dick and Harry.

Crash! Crash! Crash!

Three shots rang out, a girl screamed, there came a bellow of hoarse voices, the tinkle of broken glass and then a brief silence. As T., D. and H., white of face and

with eyes bright with excitement, raised themselves above the level of the table they were just in time to see the red-headed cowhand vanish into the night through the wildly swinging doors. Within a handful of seconds a pony squealed, two more shots joined the echoes of those others and the pounding of hoofs indicated that the cowhand had decided that Tombstone would look a lot better from a distance of a dozen miles.

"That settles it," said Gordon. "Link hands, fellows, we're going back to the hotel for a spot of shut-eye and I don't fancy getting to the hotel the usual way. Ready?" And, before the others could raise a single protest, the world seemed to rock about their ears and they found themselves in the room they were to share for the night.

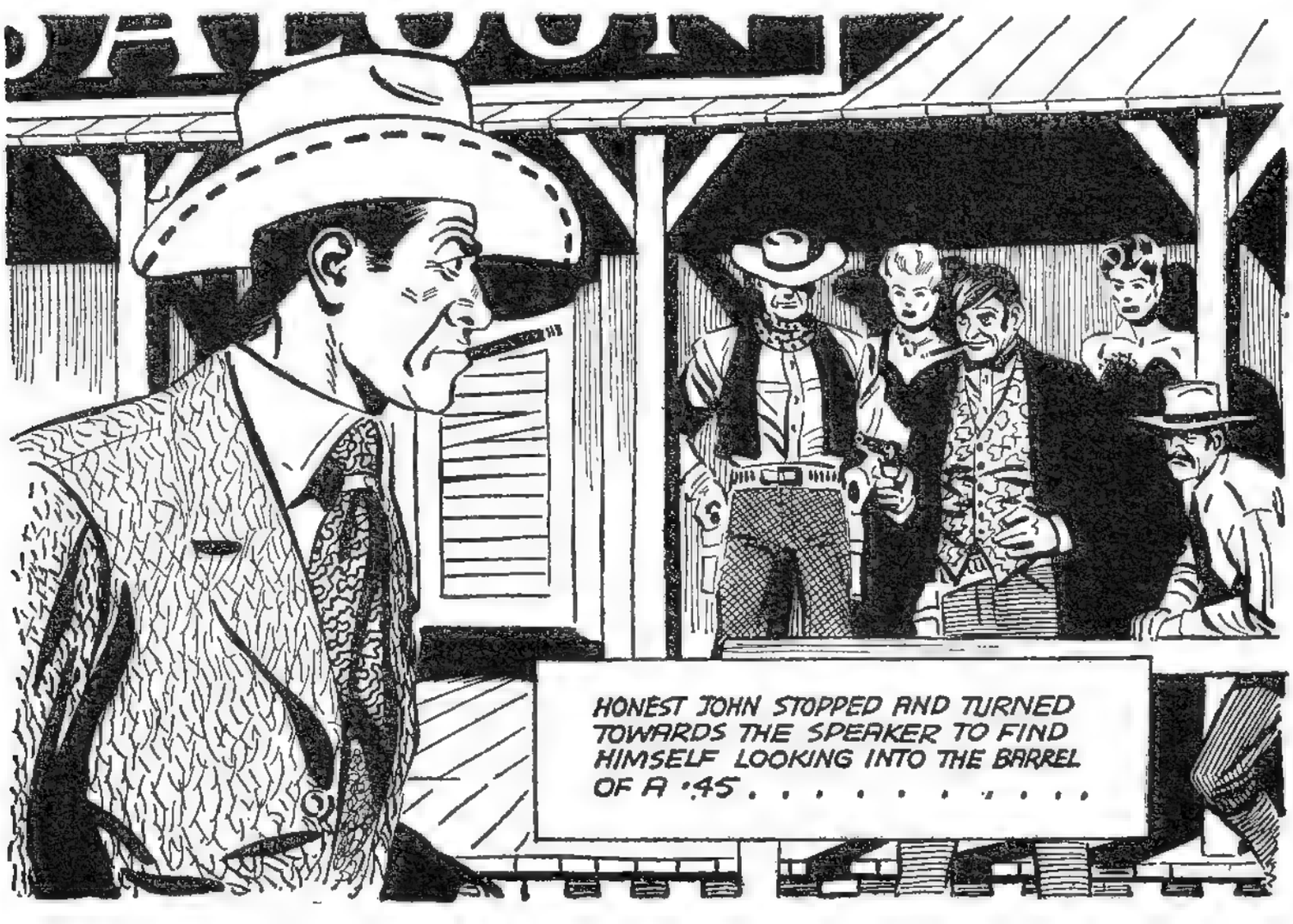
Sleep came swiftly, after the excitement of the day, and all three felt as fit as fleas as they greeted the new day that peeked through the dirty windows. They took their time washing and dressing but, finishing at last, found Gordon waiting for them downstairs with ham and eggs and lashings of scalding-hot black coffee set out on a rough wooden table.

"Tuck in, fellows," he said. "You'll need to be well lined to-day."

"Why?" This from Harry Dalby, who always aimed to know so much.

"We're leaving for Colorado," came the reply. "Reckon there's a spot of bother at the U-R ranch."

T., D. and H. looked their disappointment, but were wise enough to ask no more questions. Instead they tucked into that substantial breakfast and felt a great deal better for it when the last morsel of bread had been used to soak up the last smear of fat. It was true that they would have given a great deal to see Black Mike Delaney and more still if they could have been witnesses of a showdown between that killer and Sheriff Slaughter of Cochise County, but as Dick put it to himself: "A fellow



can't have everything and it's more than something to have seen Tombstone in its heyday!"

"What time do we leave?" asked Harry.

"I——" began Gordon, then he stopped and, turning, the boys saw the figure of John Slaughter coming across the room. "Trouble?" drawled the strange fellow, who seemed to know everyone who had ever lived in the West.

"You've said it," jerked out Honest John. "Better keep off the streets, fellows; leastways, until dark. Savvy?" He hitched up his belt and for a brief moment touched the pearl-handled butt of his six-shooter. "I ain't saying more than this: Black Mike figures on comin' out into the open. S'long!" And, with that, from a pocket of his fancy waistcoat adorned with red and yellow rosebuds, he fished out a cigar, stuck it in the corner of his mouth, nodded to all four fellows and sauntered away. It all happened in less than a minute and had left Gordon with a worried frown creasing his brows.

"Quickly!" he snapped. "We'll get our ponies saddled and hitched behind the hotel. Then we'll wait our chance to get out of town. Heck!"—he punched a palm with a clenched fist—"I'd no right to bring you here."

Dick opened his mouth to say something but promptly shut it again as he caught the look in his strange friend's eyes. Then the four headed for a door in the rear of the hotel, found their ponies already fed by the broken-toothed handyman of the establishment, and soon had them saddled and ready for anything that might happen.

The morning passed quietly, so quietly, in fact, that it was hard to believe that this was the notorious town of Tombstone where, on Boot Hill, at least twenty badmen and not a few innocent bystanders were buried, some with headstones bearing no more than the laconic message: "HERE LIES A GUY WHO DIDN'T DRAW QUICK ENOUGH!" or "HERE LIES PETE. DIED JULY 1884." It was very hot and the dust lay thick on the road, muffling the hoofbeats of the occasional pony that cantered into town bringing a cowhand with silver dollars jingling in the pockets of his jeans, or a gambler hoping to mend his fortunes at the gaming-tables that were more plentiful in Tombstone than autumn leaves in a city park.

Gordon had taken T., D. and H. to a little saddler's next to the Oriental Saloon, and there they yarned with the proprietor of the store, who seemed only too willing to cease work on a magnificent saddle to talk about the township he had watched grow from a collection of tents and shacks to something akin to a thriving city.

It was early in the afternoon, just after two, maybe, when Tom Hall saw that Sheriff John Slaughter was coming swinging down the street. At the same moment, he and his companions saw a dark-skinned man lounging at the entrance to the Oriental. Behind him were a couple of dance-hall girls and one or two other men, who were obviously there to back up the dark-skinned man. All were armed with ·45s snug against their hips.

"Steady," hissed Gordon. "That's Black Mike. Remember what I said. Keep out of trouble. Understand?"

Dick nodded, but none of the three took their eyes off the slowly approaching sheriff, who seemed to be deliberately courting trouble as, with cigar at a jaunty angle, he approached the saloon. He had just come abreast of the notorious gunman and horse-thief lounging by the Oriental when the latter took a single step forward and drawled:

"Hold up there, Mr. Dude Sheriff."

Honest John stopped and turned towards the speaker, to find himself looking into the barrel of a ·45. For once Black Mike had the drop of his enemy and it looked as if he was glorying in the thrill of it. Across the street men backed into what shelter they could find, and a woman went scurrying away with a series of little squeals of fear.

"It ain't respectful, Sheriff," drawled Black Mike, "for the law to be smokin' in public, so I guess I aim to teach you a lesson in manners."

Then the ·45 boomed and the cigar in John Slaughter's mouth seemed to burst and vanish. Harry Dalby turned to look at Gordon and, because of that, he missed what followed. It all happened more rapidly than the eye could take in. In the fraction of a second the sheriff drew, aimed and fired.

"Aaaaah!" With a howl of pain Black Mike Delaney clutched at a shattered wrist as his ·45 went clattering away to slither along the sidewalk. But he wasn't out of trouble yet. The sheriff took one step forward and his right fist swung hard against the gunman's jaw, sending the outlaw sprawling into the thick dust of the street.

Then John Slaughter spoke. "If it's manners and suchlike y'r interested in," he snapped. "I'll do a little teachin' myself." Then, with another incredibly swift movement, he picked up the outlaw's six-gun, emptied the cylinders and flung the weapon full at the face of the prostrate man. There was a gush of blood from a deeply gashed cheek as Black Mike staggered to his feet. "There's your hardware, horse-thief," he went on. "Now get out of town and stay out. If you come back, by thunder, I'll kill you on sight."

Black Mike Delaney raised his left hand, and it seemed that the affair might still develop; then his hand fell limply to his side and he slunk into the saloon, leaving a trail of bloodspots from his shattered wrist.

"Whoopee!" cheered Tom Hall, but he had made no more than one forward movement when he felt himself hauled back, twisted round and flung into a corner of the little saddler's store. His ears rang with the sound of shots and it seemed as if an army of troops had suddenly invaded Tombstone. Shots poured from the Oriental Saloon, spattering against the wooden walls of houses and stores on the opposite side of the road. The cohorts of Black Mike, even as some hustled their leader through the saloon and helped him to mount a waiting pony, did their best to kill the new sheriff of Cochise County. Each man knew that, if they failed to kill their man, their days in Tombstone, or indeed on earth, were numbered. The township and County would be too small to hold them and Honest John Slaughter. At last the sheriff had declared war against the badmen of Tombstone and had, with remarkable skill, made certain that the leader of the gunmen of the town was the first to be dealt with.

"They'll kill him!" yelled Dick Barrington as he fired blindly with his Colt.

"Get back!" yelled Gordon. "You'll draw their fire. Oh, heck!" His warning had come too late. Several of the Black Mike supporters had turned their guns on the saddler's and slugs thudded against a heavy wooden horse used to hold newly made saddles. The saddler himself had gone to earth like a fleeing rabbit.

Crash! Crash!

Dick Barrington seemed to bear a charmed life as he returned that fire, aided by his two friends and a grim-faced Gordon Gregory who kept muttering: "I knew this would happen. I knew it!"

"It's all right, Gordon!" yelled Tom with a triumphant whoop. "We've got them on the run."

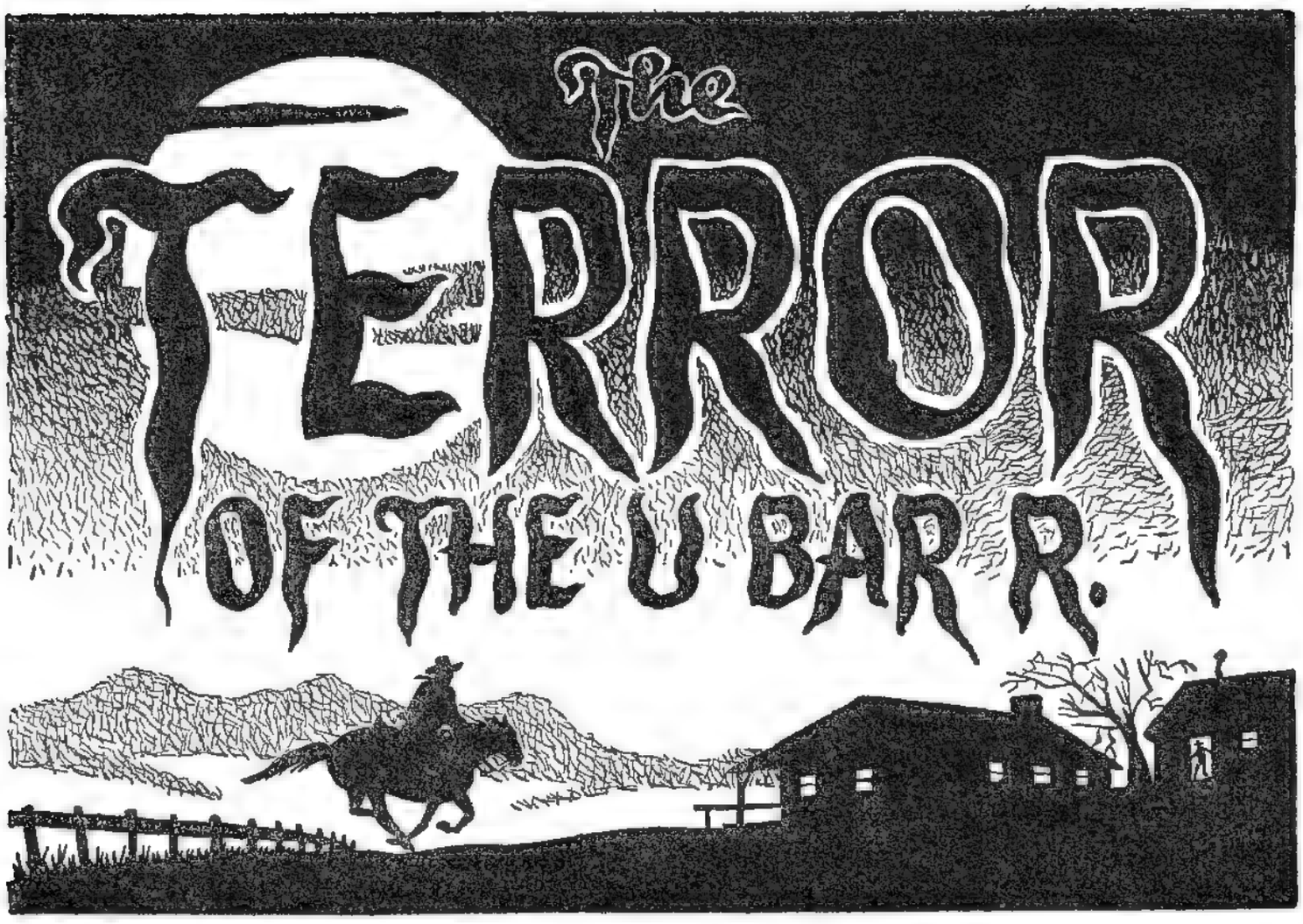
By that time a few other honest citizens of Tombstone, among them an ink-stained John Clum, editor of *The Epitaph,* had joined in the shooting. Shotguns, rifles and ·45s combined to add to the noise, and already two of Black Mike Delaney's friends lay still in the thick dust of the roadway, the while others dodged from cover to cover trying hard to reach their waiting ponies, always kept ready saddled for instant emergency.

"Come on!" hissed Gordon at last. "We're getting——" It was as if he had eyes at the back of his head because, in the middle of his sentence, he whirled round and snapped a shot at a little runt of a man who, from the roof of the Oriental, was on the point of killing the sheriff. There was a howl of pain from the little man as he toppled over the edge and fell, still yelling, to the sidewalk. He lay there for a matter of seconds before scrambling to his feet and, with one arm hanging limply, scuttled away at his best possible pace under the circumstances. "We're getting out!" finished Gordon. "Come on. I mean it, Tom," he snapped to that fellow, "or, by jingo, I'll have you back home quicker than thinking."

Tom nodded. "I'm ready!" he said.

"Right! *Run!"* And across the road raced the four newcomers to Tombstone. In less than two minutes they were in the saddle and, barring a few shots that whistled over their heads, were clear of the township without further incident. Behind them they could hear the sounds of fighting as Honest John Slaughter, sheriff of Cochise County, finished what he had started when Black Mike had so foolishly shot the cigar out of his mouth.

"Keep going!" screamed Gordon.



THE cocks were crowing and there came a squeaking sound from the well as T., D. and H., with Gordon Gregory riding slightly ahead, reached a ridge and were able to look down on the U–R ranch near Bear Creek, Colorado. Gordon slid from the saddle and then, ground-hitching his pony, signed to the others to do the same.

"Now what?" asked Dick Barrington. "Jingo! This is grand, just like old times, but I thought you said something about joining Bill Cody in a camp, Gordon?"

The strange fellow nodded. "I did," he admitted, "and we will contact Buffalo Bill before you have to go back, but I had to bring you here first. As I told you, I heard of the trouble at the U–R while we were in Tombstone and, so far as I can judge, there's no time to waste. Looks peaceful enough, doesn't it?" And the speaker nodded in the direction of the ranch, just rousing in the early morning light.

"It sure does!" drawled Harry Dalby, always ready to adopt the Western drawl or, to put it better, to do as Rome did when he was, in a manner of speaking, in Rome. "We won't ask any questions about how we got here," he went on, "but I think we'd all like to know what is expected of us now we are here. You mentioned a terror—*what* terror? Human or otherwise?"

"Animal!" snapped Gordon. "The U–R is owned by Weston Lord, one of the wealthiest ranchers and horse-breeders in the State, and for several months past he's been losing prize bulls and some of his best horses through the visits of some four-footed killer. It comes usually by night, gets into stables and corrals and kills almost

without a sound. Now I'm aiming to see——" He broke off and sprang to his feet from where he had been squatting. "What's that?" he demanded and all four saw that the ranch had been roused with startling suddenness. Men came running from all directions, a triangle clanged and, even from that distance, the four travellers through the old Wild and Woolly West could hear someone barking orders. "Come on, chaps," commanded Gordon. "Looks very much as if the killer has struck again."

A moment later he was in the saddle and the four came thundering into the paddock of the U–R in time to be met by a short, red-faced, white-haired man who had obviously dressed in a great hurry and was suffering from suppressed rage that caused a pulse to beat in his temple.

"Steady, Mr. Lord!"

Gordon slipped from the saddle, advanced a step or two and gripped the rancher's arm.

It was at that moment that T., D. and H. noticed that their friend seemed to be at least half a dozen years older and that he wore a marshal's star on the breast of his shirt. They exchanged quick glances and Dick put a finger to his lips. "Keep your tongues between your teeth, chaps!" he hissed. "We'll take a lead from Gordon."

That lead wasn't long in coming. Weston Lord had greeted Gordon Gregory with a gasp of surprise and relief. "Marshal!" he cried, wringing the younger man's hand until it seemed he would never let go. "I'm mighty glad to see you. The goldurned brute's killed Grey Beauty—think of it, man, the finest mare in the whole durned West. We've got to get it, Marshal, or I'm finished. This business has cost me something like forty thousand dollars and I tell you, here and now, I can't stand much more." The speaker's gaze shifted to Tom, Dick and Harry. "Who are y'r pals, Marshal?"

Gordon whirled round, shot the three a quick all-embracing glance and then introduced them.

"Jed Mellow's boys, Mr. Lord!" he drawled. "I'm kinda acting as their guide. You know Jed?" He didn't wait for a reply. "No, I guess you wouldn't. Anyway, the kids are O.K. Now"—he was briskness itself—"how about letting me see the dead mare? She *is* dead?" questioningly.

The rancher nodded. "Yep!" he rasped. "My foreman found her in her stable not ten minutes ago. Ah, here is Jim Batt." He turned, to face a tall, lean man with a livid scar running down the side of his sunburnt face. "Meet Marshal Gregory and some pals of his, Jim! Reckon they couldn't have come at a better time. Any more casualties?"

Weston Lord spoke breathlessly, like a man who had been running.

The foreman shook his head. "It's got me beat," he admitted. "Jack Kettle says he didn't hear a thing. Matter of fact he'd reported to me that everything was O.K. only five minutes before we found Grey Beauty." Suddenly he seemed to remember that he hadn't acknowledged the introductions. "Howdy!" he drawled and the smile he flashed in the direction of the four left nothing to grumble about, even if it was a little twisted.

"Well, reckon a bite to eat wouldn't come amiss!" said the rancher. "This way, Marshal!" He bawled for a horse-wrangler. "Stable them ponies, Jeff!" he ordered.

Breakfast over, the visitors to the U–R were taken to see the dead mare. It was a pitiful sight and T., D. and H. did not stay long in the stable, but Gordon Gregory

"OKAY," THE FELLOW WITH THE STATE MARSHAL'S STAR SPOKE BRISKLY. "I'D LIKE YOU TO MEET ME AT THE HORSE CORRAL AT ELEVEN TO-NIGHT"

was there for the best part of half an hour. When he came out his face was set and grim.

"Well?" demanded Dick. "Was it a mountain lion?"

The self-made marshal shook his head. "Killer——" he began, but a movement behind him caused him to halt his sentence. "Killed in a few seconds," he went on. "I agree with you, Mr. Batt," he added, turning to face the foreman. "The poor creature never knew what it was attacked her. Care to mount guard to-night? The boys and I aim to see that nothing happens to the stallions Mr. Lord shipped from the north."

The foreman shrugged. "It ain't possible, Marshal," he drawled. "Got to ride some place for Mr. Lord and I'm likely to be away two days. Howsomever, I'll have Jack Kettle detailed to keep you comp'ny. O.K.?"

Gordon Gregory nodded. "Sure!" he agreed. "That's fine! Be seeing you! S'long!" He waved almost airily and, with Tom, Dick and Harry right by him, hurried back to the long, low ranch house that was the pride and joy of its wealthy owner. No one said anything until they were safely inside and Chung Soo, the beaming Chinese cook, had served them with hot drinks.

"Now, let's have it," demanded Dick.

Gordon lowered his voice. "Grey Beauty was killed by a dog——" he began.

"A dog?" There was an incredulous chorus.

"Keep y'r voices down, fellows!" Warningly from Gordon Gregory. "Yes, a dog —a killer-dog. The Apache Indians have been breeding hunting-dogs for years, and although they don't use them much now there are a number of wild ones in the foothills yonder——" The speaker jerked his head to indicate the landscape through the wide window behind him. "I've never heard of it happening before, but there's no doubt that a brute like I've mentioned has been making a dead set on Weston Lord's cattle."

"But surely someone would see the dog!" burst out Harry.

Gordon made no reply. Instead he began to laugh, as if Harry had made a joke, slapping his sides and roaring like an idiot. In the middle of his mirth the door opened and a sandy-haired cowhand came in. He swaggered across the room, spurs a-jingle, and stood with thumbs hitched in his belt in front of Gordon and the others. "Howdy, Marshal," he drawled. "Jim Batt says you want to see me."

"If y'r Jack Kettle, yes!" agreed Gordon.

"That's the name, folk!"

"O.K." The fellow with the State Marshal's star spoke briskly. "I'd like you to meet me near the horse corral at eleven to-night. Better come armed, Mister."

The man rolled a cigarette skilfully with one hand, struck a match with the flick of a horny thumbnail, took two or three drags at the smoke and nodded. "I'll be there, Marshal!" he promised. Then he turned, strode back towards the door but halted before reaching it. "Care to take a word of warning, Marshal?" he asked.

"Sure! What is it?"

The cowhand made the smoke dance between thin lips as he spoke. "It's this," he drawled; "the killer ain't human, so you'd better keep y'r eyes peeled if you want to leave the U–R all in one piece. Savvy?"

For a moment Gordon's face flushed but, mastering his emotion, he nodded. "Thanks, feller!" he answered. "We'll do just that. Be seeing you!"

At ten-thirty Gordon Gregory rose quietly to his feet and touched Dick Barrington's knee. The acknowledged leader of the three Colden College boys had been dozing over the huge log fire in the main room of the ranch house; now he sat up with a start and Tom and Harry, who had also been dozing, opened their eyes to stare at the anxious-looking Gordon.

"Quiet!" hissed their friend. "He'll sleep for two hours yet if we get out quietly!" As he spoke Gordon nodded towards the rancher who, head well back, was breathing heavily in a comfortable leather armchair that had been his for twenty or more years. "Rouse him now, however, and things are not likely to turn out as I want them to. Come on!" The speaker was buckling on his belt as he spoke, and a moment later the four tiptoed out of the room.

Outside there was a sliver of moon and plenty of stars. The boys drank in the cool night air and, following their friend's example, kept in the shadow of the ranch house until the rails of the horse corral loomed up straight ahead. "Now," hissed Gordon. "Get inside that shed yonder, fellows, and keep as quiet as you know how. Don't act until I yell. It doesn't matter what you see, don't do anything on y'r own. Is that quite clear? Is it?" he added, with a stern note of authority creeping into the usually kindly voice.

T., D. and H. nodded.

"Good! Then get going!" Gordon raised a hand. "Wait! You'll find plenty of knot-holes in the door of that shed. Use them and watch me. If—I say *if*—I raise my left hand, then come out, and come out shooting."

Dick nodded for his friends and himself. Then the three melted into the shadows and two minutes later were inside the shed and watching their friend as the latter lolled against the corral fence. The minutes ticked by and then, with dramatic suddenness, a dark shadow came from the ranch house, seemed to leap across the open ground and merged with the shadow that was Gordon Gregory. With eyes glued to their peepholes, Tom, Dick and Harry gripped the butts of their six-guns.

"What the——?" began Tom.

"Sssst!" This from Dick. "Gosh!" His exclamation came as he saw Gordon Gregory move his right arm; there was a grunt of pain and Jack Kettle—there was no mistaking the newcomer's figure—seemed to fold up like a jack-knife and, pitching forward, lay still. "That's Gordon's best punch; I haven't seen him use it for a heck of a time. Now what?"

"Look!" came in a whistling hiss from Tom. "The—the *killer*!"

It was true, even as Jack Kettle collapsed, another shadow crept, low on the ground, towards Gordon Gregory. Nearer and nearer it came, until only a matter of five yards separated the killer-dog from the waiting marshal. "The brute will kill him, Dick!" almost moaned Tom Hall. "I'm going out there——" He stopped as there came a faint whistle like the sound of a dying wind. It brought the killer-dog to a halt and the three watchers could see the brute turn its head. One—two—three seconds went by and then the whistle was repeated, so softly that it was hardly a sound at all.

Then Gordon, who had had his back turned to the approaching killer-dog, turned and fired at the exact moment that the dog sprang. The great brute turned over in mid-air and howled like a banshee. Its front paws beat the air and it fell with a dull thud, twitched once or twice and then was still.

"Come on!" screamed Dick Barrington as Gordon Gregory's left hand was raised.

Events after that were a little confusing. From behind the boys, as they rushed from

the shed, came a volley of shots from a ·45. They turned and answered the fire, dropping to the ground to avoid the slugs that hummed their way over their heads. It was mighty hot while it lasted, but it didn't last long.

"Cease fire!" came Gordon's high-pitched voice, a voice that the boys knew from experience could carry one heck of a distance. "Better come out, Jim Batt, if you want to live a little longer. You, too, Mason!" Out of the corner of his eye Dick saw his strange friend coming forward with a six-gun in each hand and the State Marshal's star winking in the pale light from that crescent moon. "I'm not fooling, Mister!" went on Gordon. "It's a case of four to two and the dog's as dead as Grey Beauty."

"Hey!"

Running feet came out of the darkness.

"Get back, Mr. Lord!" roared the marshal. "*Get back!*"

Crash! Crash! Crash!

The roar of that ·45 thudded against the eardrums and T., D. and H. heard Weston Lord curse as he dropped to the ground. There were more shots, twin howls of pain and then more running feet as cowhands came running from all directions.

"Jim Batt and Bud Mason are hit!" shouted someone.

"It was their own fault," drawled Gordon. He advanced, with a puzzled trio close to him, towards the little knot of men surrounding the wounded foreman and the trail-boss of the U–R. "The killer's over yonder, Mr. Lord," he went on, "and there's the guy who gave the dog its orders to kill y'r cattle and horses." He nodded in the direction of the prostrate Jim Batt. "Bud Mason, Jack Kettle and that no-good maverick aimed to wait till you were nearly broke and then to get up a syndicate to buy the whole durned ranch for a few thousand dollars, twenty thousand, maybe—maybe less."

The rancher looked bewildered as rough hands dragged the prisoners to their feet and, acting under Gordon's orders, hustled them away. "But how——?" he began.

"Simple," interrupted the self-made State Marshal. "An Indian trick Batt picked up from across the border. The dog was trained to obey whistles. Unluckily for y'r crooked foreman, however, I've known that same trick for—er—quite a time. Yes," he added, meeting Dick's eyes, "I gave the whistle that halted that poor brute, then, when I'd found out where the other whistle came from, I acted."

"But——" Tom started to ask questions.

"Tell you more some other time," said Gordon quickly. "We're hitting the trail at sun-up, so I guess we'll get some shut-eye."

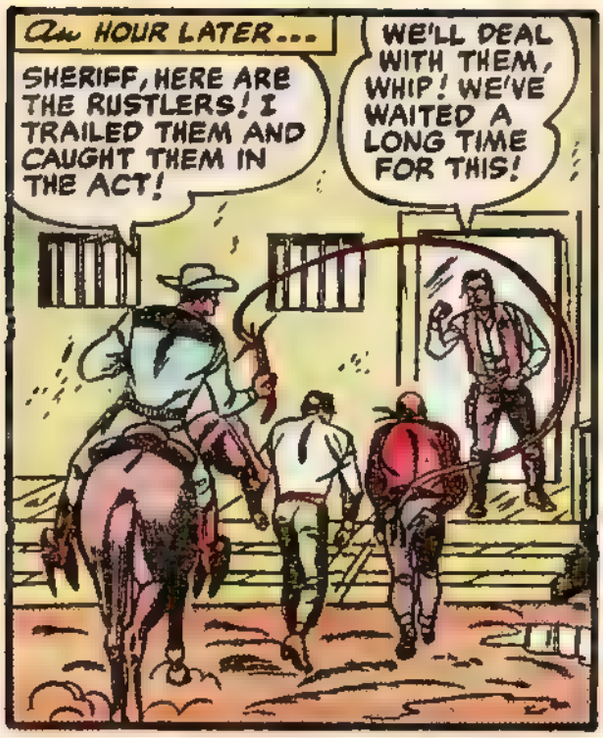
"Must you leave so early?" asked the rancher.

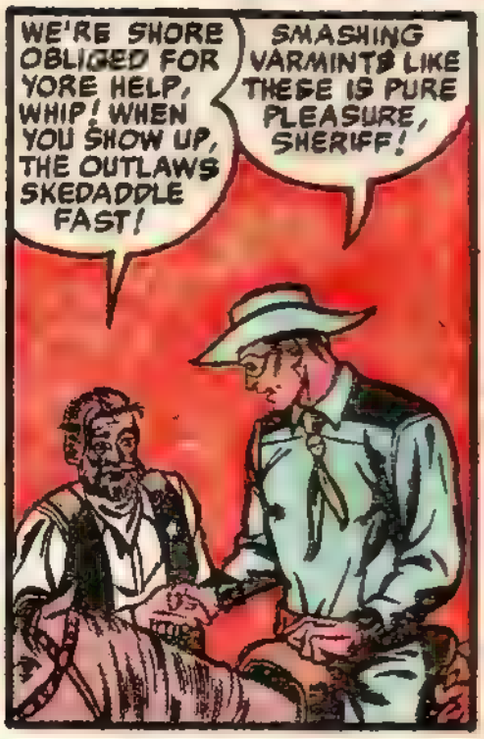
Gordon Gregory looked at him. "Afraid so, Mr. Lord," he answered. "I guess we've got an appointment with some old friends. Come on, chaps!"

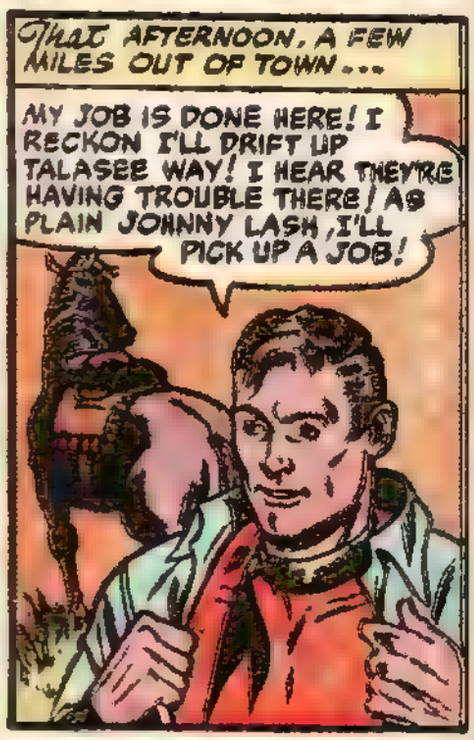
The WHIP
WANTED
DEAD OR ALIVE
$1,000
REWARD FOR
CAPTURE OF
THE WHIP
WHEN YOUNG JOHNNY LASH CREATED THE DREAD CHARACTER OF THE WHIP IT WAS FOR THE SOLE PURPOSE OF SMASHING EVIL AND SUPPORTING JUSTICE IN THE ROARING WEST! THEN SUDDENLY ANOTHER WHIP APPEARED, A GRIM FIGURE WHO PLUNDERED WITHOUT MERCY! NOT ONLY JOHNNY'S FIGHT FOR JUSTICE BUT HIS VERY LIFE DEPENDED UPON FINDING AND DESTROYING...
"The Counterfeit WHIP!"
IN A HIDDEN CANYON ON THE MONGALO RANGE...
THAT RUNNING IRON MUST BE HOT NOW, BEN! HURRY UP AND ALTER THE BRAND BEFORE SOMEBODY SPOTS OUR SMOKE!
SURE, COLT! THIS'LL MAKE TWENTY PRIME STEERS WE'VE RUSTLED THIS WEEK!
SUDDENLY...
THIS IS LIKE TAKIN' CANDY FROM A... YIIII!
STAND STILL, YOU BUZZARDS! DON'T GO FOR THOSE GUNS, COLT!

THE WHIP! I'LL KI... EEEOWW!
YOU HAVE TO LEARN THE HARD WAY, DON'T YOU?

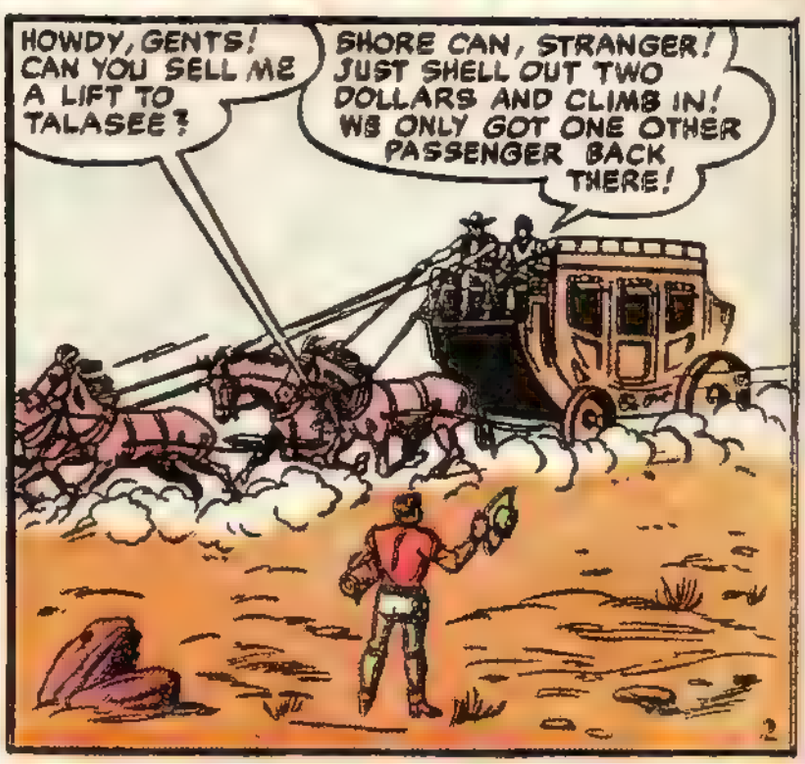
HERE'S YOUR LESSON!
NOT ME! I SURRENDER! I SURRENDER, WHIP!


An HOUR LATER...
SHERIFF, HERE ARE THE RUSTLERS! I TRAILED THEM AND CAUGHT THEM IN THE ACT!
WE'LL DEAL WITH THEM, WHIP! WE'VE WAITED A LONG TIME FOR THIS!

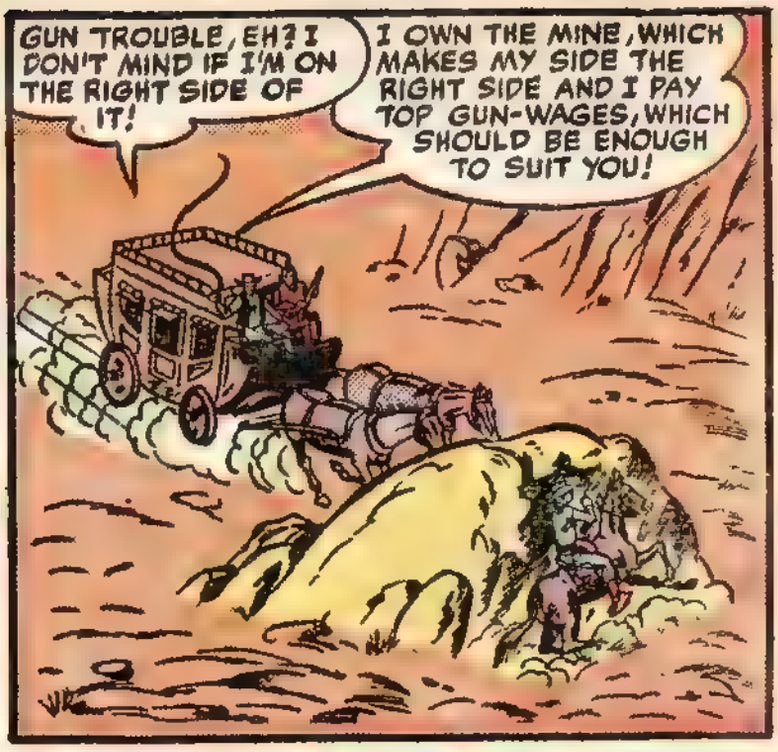

WE'RE SHORE OBLIGED FOR YORE HELP, WHIP! WHEN YOU SHOW UP, THE OUTLAWS SKEDADDLE FAST!
SMASHING VARMINTS LIKE THESE IS PURE PLEASURE, SHERIFF!

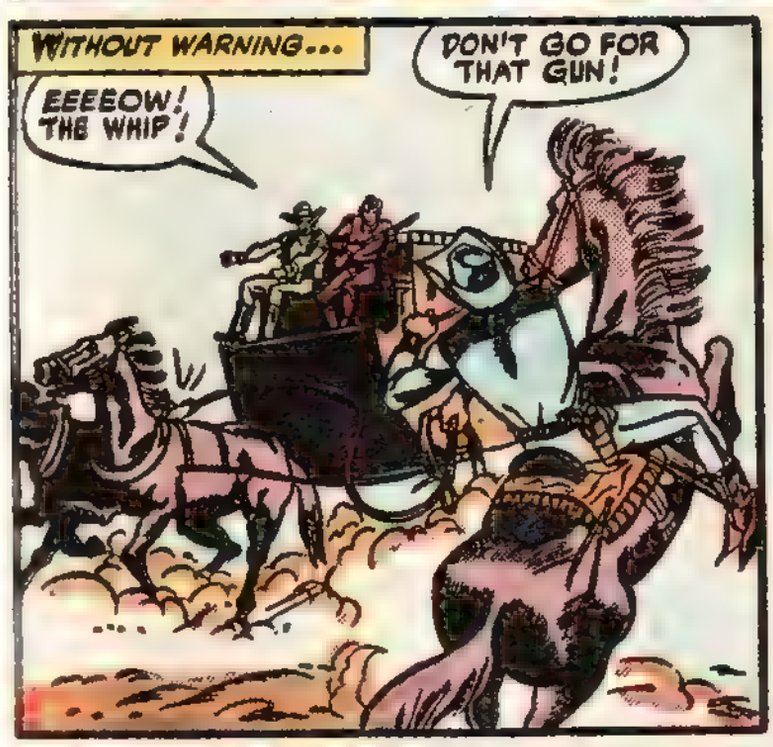

That AFTERNOON, A FEW MILES OUT OF TOWN...
MY JOB IS DONE HERE! I RECKON I'LL DRIFT UP TALASEE WAY! I HEAR THEY'RE HAVING TROUBLE THERE! AS PLAIN JOHNNY LASH, I'LL PICK UP A JOB!

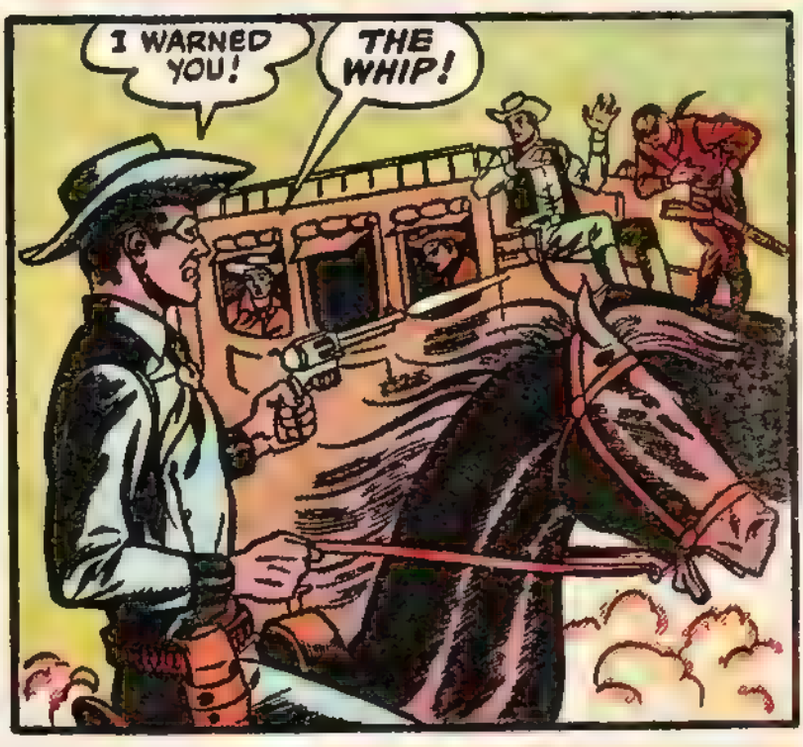
YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN, DIABLO! STAY OUT OF SIGHT BUT FOLLOW ALONG WHILE I RIDE THE STAGE!


HOWDY, GENTS! CAN YOU SELL ME A LIFT TO TALASEE?
SHORE CAN, STRANGER! JUST SHELL OUT TWO DOLLARS AND CLIMB IN! WE ONLY GOT ONE OTHER PASSENGER BACK THERE!

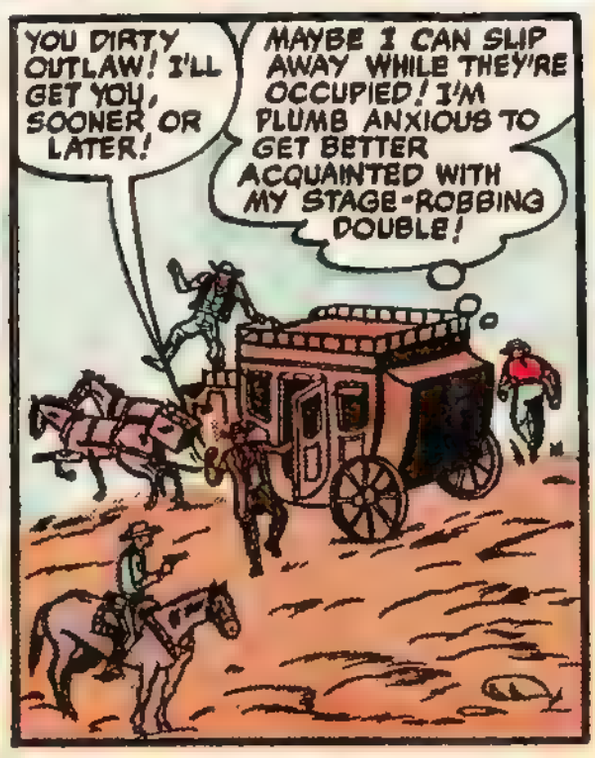
HOWDY, MISTER! I'M JOHNNY LASH, DRIFTING UP TALASEE WAY TO FIND ME SOME WORK!
I'M JESS BERGER, LASH! IF YOU CAN USE THAT GUN YOU WEAR, SEE ME AT THE SILVER QUEEN MINE ABOVE TALASEE IN THE MORNING!

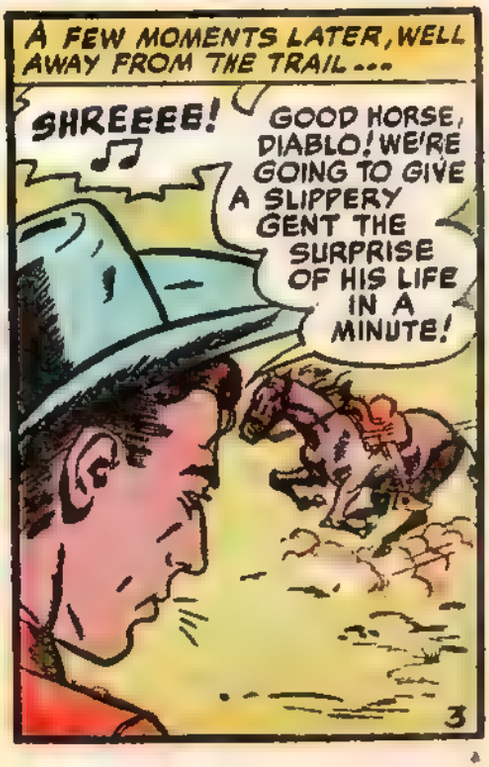

GUN TROUBLE, EH? I DON'T MIND IF I'M ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF IT!
I OWN THE MINE, WHICH MAKES MY SIDE THE RIGHT SIDE AND I PAY TOP GUN-WAGES, WHICH SHOULD BE ENOUGH TO SUIT YOU!


WITHOUT WARNING...
EEEEOW! THE WHIP!
DON'T GO FOR THAT GUN!

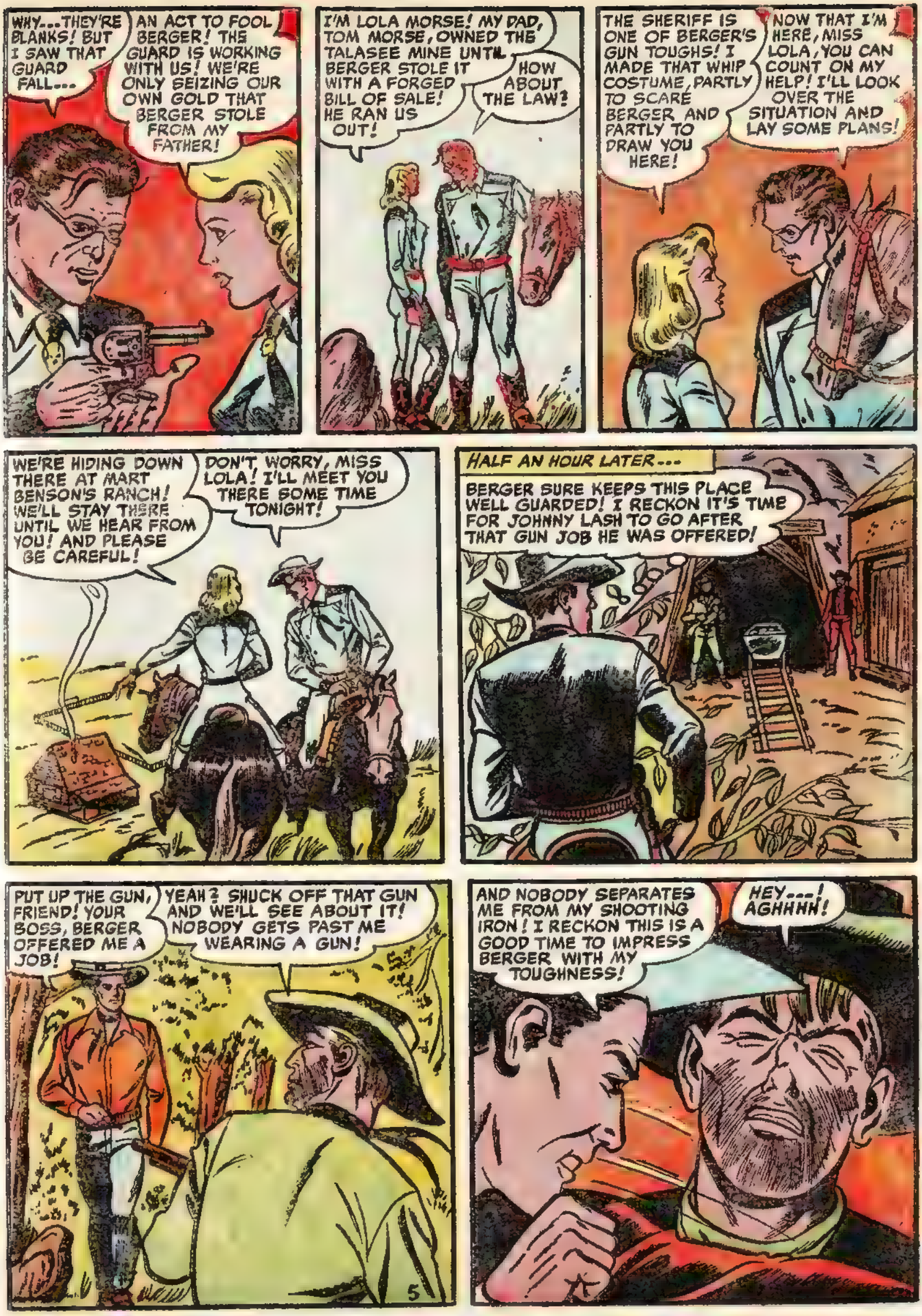

I WARNED YOU!
THE WHIP!

BUT...BUT I'M THE WHIP! SOMEBODY'S HIDING BEHIND MY IDENTITY!
COME ON OUT, BERGER, WITH YOUR HANDS UP! YOU KNOW WHAT I'M AFTER!


YOU DIRTY OUTLAW! I'LL GET YOU, SOONER OR LATER!
MAYBE I CAN SLIP AWAY WHILE THEY'RE OCCUPIED! I'M PLUMB ANXIOUS TO GET BETTER ACQUAINTED WITH MY STAGE-ROBBING DOUBLE!


A FEW MOMENTS LATER, WELL AWAY FROM THE TRAIL...
SHREEEE!
GOOD HORSE, DIABLO! WE'RE GOING TO GIVE A SLIPPERY GENT THE SURPRISE OF HIS LIFE IN A MINUTE!

STEADY, BOY!
YIH! THE WHIP!
I'LL REMOVE THAT GUN, HOMBRE! YOU'RE TOO HANDY WITH IT!
YOU'LL NEVER UNMASK ME!
AND YOU'LL NEED MORE PRACTISE TO TAKE OVER MY JOB, MISTER!
LET'S HAVE A DOWN-TO-EARTH DISCUSSION!
GUG-G-G!
I'LL TAKE THAT MASK!
NO...!
AWRRK! A GIRL!
I HOPE YOU'RE S-SATISFIED, YOU BIG BULLY!
I...I CAN'T BELIEVE IT! A BEAUTIFUL GIRL LIKE YOU, A THIEF AND A KILLER!
I'M NOT A THIEF AND I KILLED NO ONE! TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT MY GUN BEFORE YOU CALL NAMES, MISTER WHIP!

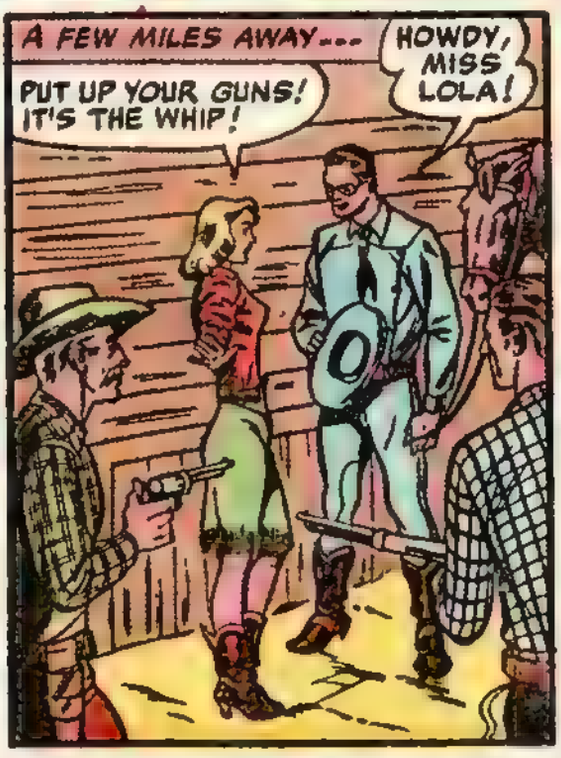

WHY...THEY'RE BLANKS! BUT I SAW THAT GUARD FALL...
AN ACT TO FOOL BERGER! THE GUARD IS WORKING WITH US! WE'RE ONLY SEIZING OUR OWN GOLD THAT BERGER STOLE FROM MY FATHER!
I'M LOLA MORSE! MY DAD, TOM MORSE, OWNED THE TALASEE MINE UNTIL BERGER STOLE IT WITH A FORGED BILL OF SALE! HE RAN US OUT!
HOW ABOUT THE LAW?
THE SHERIFF IS ONE OF BERGER'S GUN TOUGHS! I MADE THAT WHIP COSTUME, PARTLY TO SCARE BERGER AND PARTLY TO DRAW YOU HERE!
NOW THAT I'M HERE, MISS LOLA, YOU CAN COUNT ON MY HELP! I'LL LOOK OVER THE SITUATION AND LAY SOME PLANS!
WE'RE HIDING DOWN THERE AT MART BENSON'S RANCH! WE'LL STAY THERE UNTIL WE HEAR FROM YOU! AND PLEASE BE CAREFUL!
DON'T WORRY, MISS LOLA! I'LL MEET YOU THERE SOME TIME TONIGHT!
HALF AN HOUR LATER...
BERGER SURE KEEPS THIS PLACE WELL GUARDED! I RECKON IT'S TIME FOR JOHNNY LASH TO GO AFTER THAT GUN JOB HE WAS OFFERED!
PUT UP THE GUN, FRIEND! YOUR BOSS, BERGER OFFERED ME A JOB!
YEAH? SHUCK OFF THAT GUN AND WE'LL SEE ABOUT IT! NOBODY GETS PAST ME WEARING A GUN!
5
AND NOBODY SEPARATES ME FROM MY SHOOTING IRON! I RECKON THIS IS A GOOD TIME TO IMPRESS BERGER WITH MY TOUGHNESS!
HEY...! AGHHHH!

HOLD IT, BOYS! YOU'RE THE FELLOW WHO WAS ON THE STAGE WITH ME! WHAT DID YOU DO TO LEFTY?
JUST TAUGHT HIM NOT TO TRY TO TAKE MY GUN AWAY FROM ME! YOU GOT THAT JOB OPEN, AMIGO?
FOR ANYBODY WHO GETS THE JUMP ON LEFTY, I HAVE! COME ON IN AND WE'LL TALK!
YOU MEAN YOU THOUGHT THIS GENT WAS TOUGH? SOUNDS TO ME LIKE YOU GOT A NEED FOR A REAL MAN AROUND HERE!
WHERE DID YOU DISAPPEAR TO WHEN THE WHIP HELD US UP? IF YOU'RE SO TOUGH, WHY DIDN'T YOU TAKE HIM?
FOR FREE? I AIN'T TANGLIN' WITH THE WHIP UNTIL I'M ON SOMEBODY'S PAYROLL! BESIDES I HAD ME ANOTHER JOB TO DO!
I KINDA FIGURED YOU'D LIKE TO KNOW WHERE THE WHIP TOOK YOUR BULLION CHEST, SO I TRAILED HIM!
YOU DID? TALK UP, MISTER! YOU GOT YOURSELF A TOP JOB IF YOU FOUND THAT OUT!
HE HANDED IT OVER TO SOME GENTS ON MART BENSON'S RANCH! ONE OF 'EM WAS A HOMBRE NAMED MORSE!
THAT'S WHERE THEY'RE HIDING OUT! LASH, YOU'LL GET A REAL BONUS FOR THAT PIECE OF BUSINESS!
I'LL GET THE BOYS TOGETHER AND WE'LL WIPE OUT THE WHOLE CROWD TODAY! THAT'S ALL I'VE NEEDED---!
DON'T BE IN A HURRY! I HEARD 'EM SAY THEY WERE HAVING A MEETING TONIGHT AT TEN! WHY NOT WAIT AND GET 'EM ALL AT ONCE?
THE WAY THEY TALKED, THEY'LL HAVE ALL THEIR FRIENDS THERE AND NO GUARDS OUT! THEY AIM TO DIVVY UP THE GOLD THEY STOLE!
YOU WIN, LASH! I WISH I'D HAD YOU INSTEAD OF THESE DUMB GUNHANDS LONG AGO! WE'LL STRIKE AT TEN TONIGHT AND WIPE THEM ALL OUT!
6

FROM WHAT I HEARD, YOU STOLE THIS MINE FROM MORSE! I HOPE YOU CAN MAKE IT STICK, IN CASE A U.S. MARSHAL STEPS IN!
DON'T WORRY! I'VE GOT A BILL OF SALE IN HERE AND IT LOOKS LIKE MORSE'S SIGNATURE! IF HE'S DEAD, HE CAN'T ARGUE ABOUT IT!

NOW WHERE ARE YOU GOING? I DON'T LIKE MY BOYS DRIFTING AROUND LOOSE WHEN WE GOT A JOB COMING UP!
I DRIFT WHERE I PLEASE, BERGER, AND I DON'T LIKE GENTS TO ARGUE ABOUT IT! I'LL SEE YOU BEFORE TEN TONIGHT!

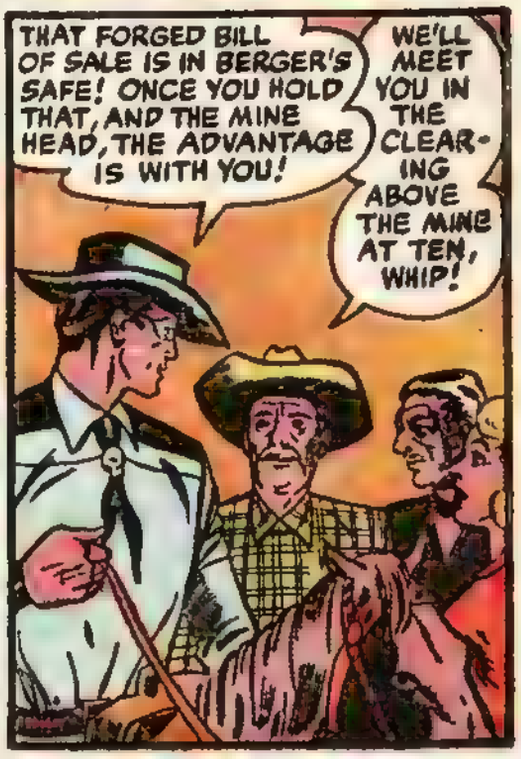
A FEW MINUTES LATER, UP THE MOUNTAIN SIDE---
BERGER DOESN'T TRUST ANYBODY---BUT HE'S AFRAID TO BLOCK ME! LIKE ALL YELLOW COYOTES, HE'S EASY TO BLUFF!


A FEW MILES AWAY---
HOWDY, MISS LOLA!
PUT UP YOUR GUNS! IT'S THE WHIP!

WHIP, THIS IS MY DAD, TOM MORSE, AND MART BENTON!
HOWDY, GENTS! I CAME TO WARN YOU THAT BERGER AIMS TO CLOSE IN ON YOU HERE AT TEN TONIGHT AND WIPE YOU ALL OUT!

HERE? HOW DID HE FIND OUT WE WERE MEETING HERE? SOMEBODY MUST HAVE TIPPED HIM OFF!
A FRIEND OF MINE DID, MR. MORSE! I TOLD HIM TO PERSUADE BERGER TO BRING ALL HIS MEN HERE FOR A RAID!

WHILE BERGER AND HIS CREW ARE SURROUNDING AN EMPTY HOUSE, YOUR CROWD CAN SEIZE THE MINE! HE WON'T LEAVE MANY GUARDS THERE!
THE WHIP'S RIGHT! POSSESSION OF THE MINE IS NINE POINTS OF THE LAW! IF WE SEIZE IT, HE'LL HAVE TO GET IT BY OPEN WARFARE!


THAT FORGED BILL OF SALE IS IN BERGER'S SAFE! ONCE YOU HOLD THAT, AND THE MINE HEAD, THE ADVANTAGE IS WITH YOU!
WE'LL MEET YOU IN THE CLEARING ABOVE THE MINE AT TEN, WHIP!

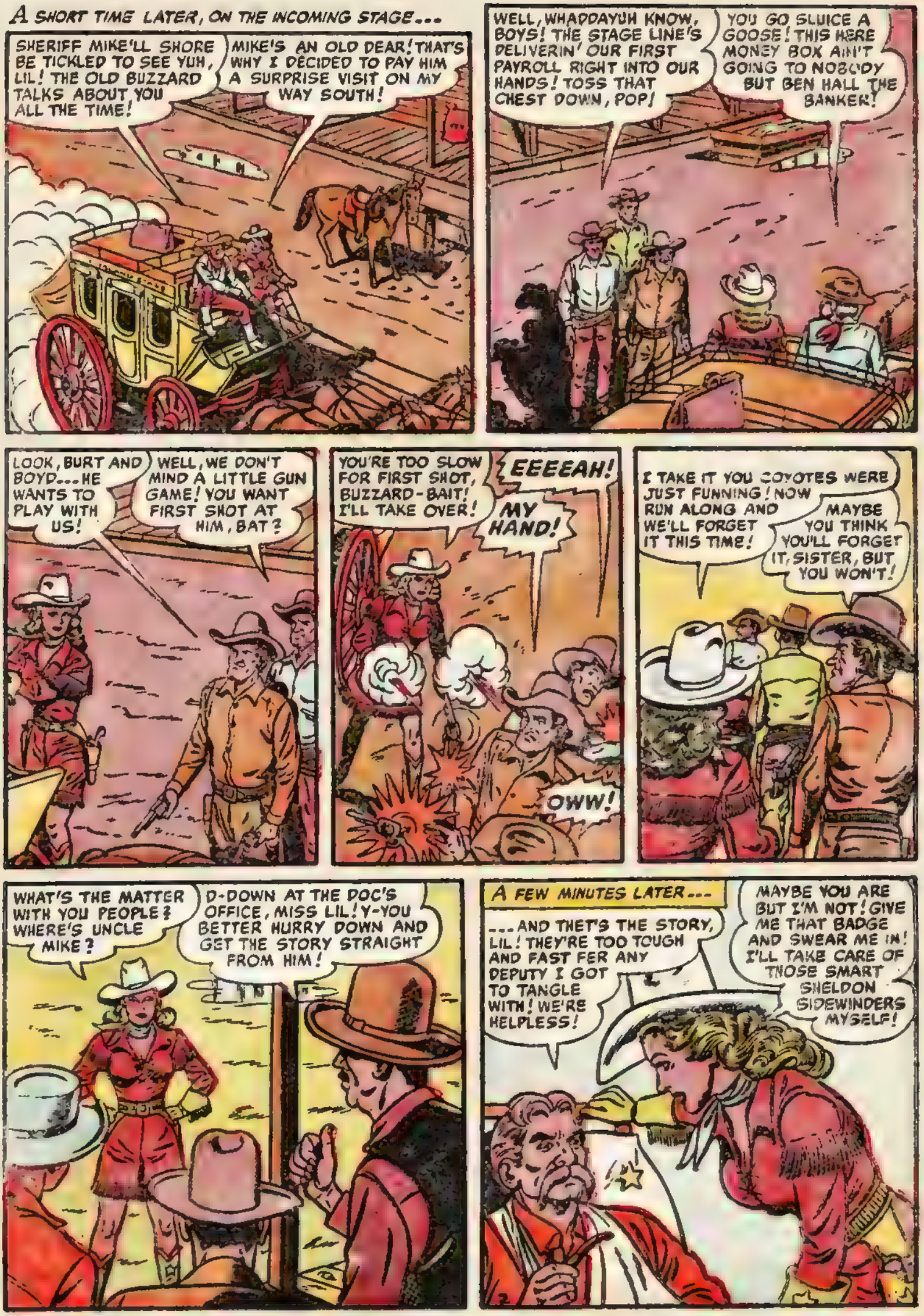
That night
LET'S GO! WE'LL SURROUND THE BENSON RANCH HOUSE AND CLOSE IN! MAKE SURE NONE OF THEM LIVE TO SURRENDER!
GOTCHA, JESS! LEAD THE WAY!
I'VE GOT TO SLIP AWAY! MORSE'S MEN WILL BE WAITING IN THE CLEARING FOR ME TO LEAD THEM!
YOU WOULDN'T BE GETTING IDEAS, LASH...?
I NEVER DID TRUST YOU! WHAT'S THE IDEA OF DROPPING BACK?
OKAY, LEFTY! YOU CAUGHT ME AT IT! LEAN OVER AND I'LL TELL YOU WHAT I HAD IN MIND!
THIS!
ARGHHH!
WHAT WAS THAT? WHAT ARE YOU TWO DOING BACK THERE?
UH... JUST TALKING OVER A TRICK, FRIEND! ISN'T THAT RIGHT, LEFTY?
YEAH!
WHEW! THAT WAS CLOSE! NOW TO GET BACK INTO COSTUME AND ON THE JOB AGAIN!
A FEW MOMENTS LATER...
BY THE TIME LEFTY WAKES UP AND WARNS BERGER, OUR JOB SHOULD BE DONE!
8

THERE'S NO TIME TO LOSE! FOLLOW ME AND TRY TO SURPRISE BERGER'S GUARDS AT THE MINE!
WHIP! WE KNEW YOU'D COME!
YOU'RE MIGHTY EXPERT WITH THAT WHIP, MA'AM!
I SHOULD BE! I'VE BEEN DRIVING ORE WAGONS SINCE I WAS A TYKE!
YOU'D BETTER KEEP WATCH FOR BERGER! AND TRY TO GET YOUR PHONY BILL OF SALE OUT OF THAT SAFE!
THAT'S EASY! IT'S MY OWN SAFE AND I KNOW THE COMBINATION!
HERE IT IS! WITH THIS DESTROYED...
WITH YOU DESTROYED, MY WORRIES ARE OVER!
I GUESSED IT WAS A TRICK AND CIRCLED BACK! TRAPPING THE WHIP WITH THE REST OF YOU WAS MORE THAN I HOPED FOR!
DON'T LET YOUR LUCK GO TO YOUR HEAD!
YOU JUST MADE A BAD MISTAKE!
YIIII!
DIABLO ALWAYS BUMPS PEOPLE WHO POINT GUNS AT ME!
I'LL DO MORE THAN POINT A GUN, NOSEY---!
9

NO, YOU DON'T, BERGER! YOUR GUN DAYS ARE OVER!
I DON'T MIND USING A GUN THE QUIET WAY!
EEEAHHH!
WE'RE GETTIN' OUT OF HERE!
YOU'D BETTER STAY AROUND FOR THE PAY-OFF, BOYS!
LIE DOWN AND BE QUIET!
BY GUM, WE LICKED 'EM!
THANKS TO YOU, MISTER WHIP, I GOT MY MINE BACK AGAIN! WE'LL SEE THAT THESE SIDE-WINDERS GET TAKEN CARE OF LEGAL-LIKE!
THEN MY JOB IS DONE! I'LL BE DRIFTING ALONG...!
GOOD LUCK, GENTS... HEY!
NO, YOU DON'T, WHIP!
WHA... MMFFF-BFFF!
THAT'S TO REMIND YOU TO COME BACK SOME DAY, WHIP!
YOU KNOW, DIABLO, WE'RE JUST LIABLE TO DO THAT... SOME DAY!

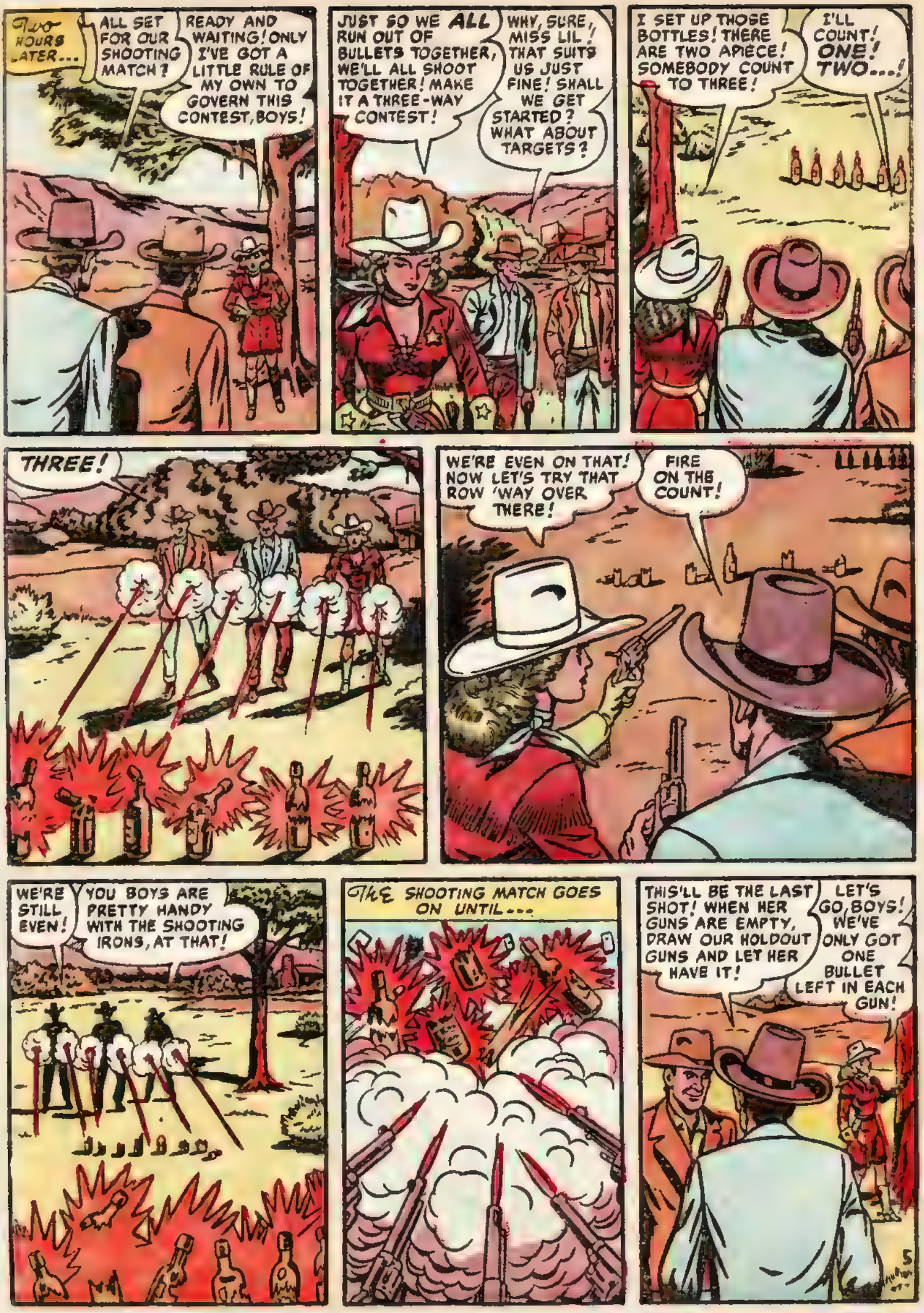
TWO-GUN LIL

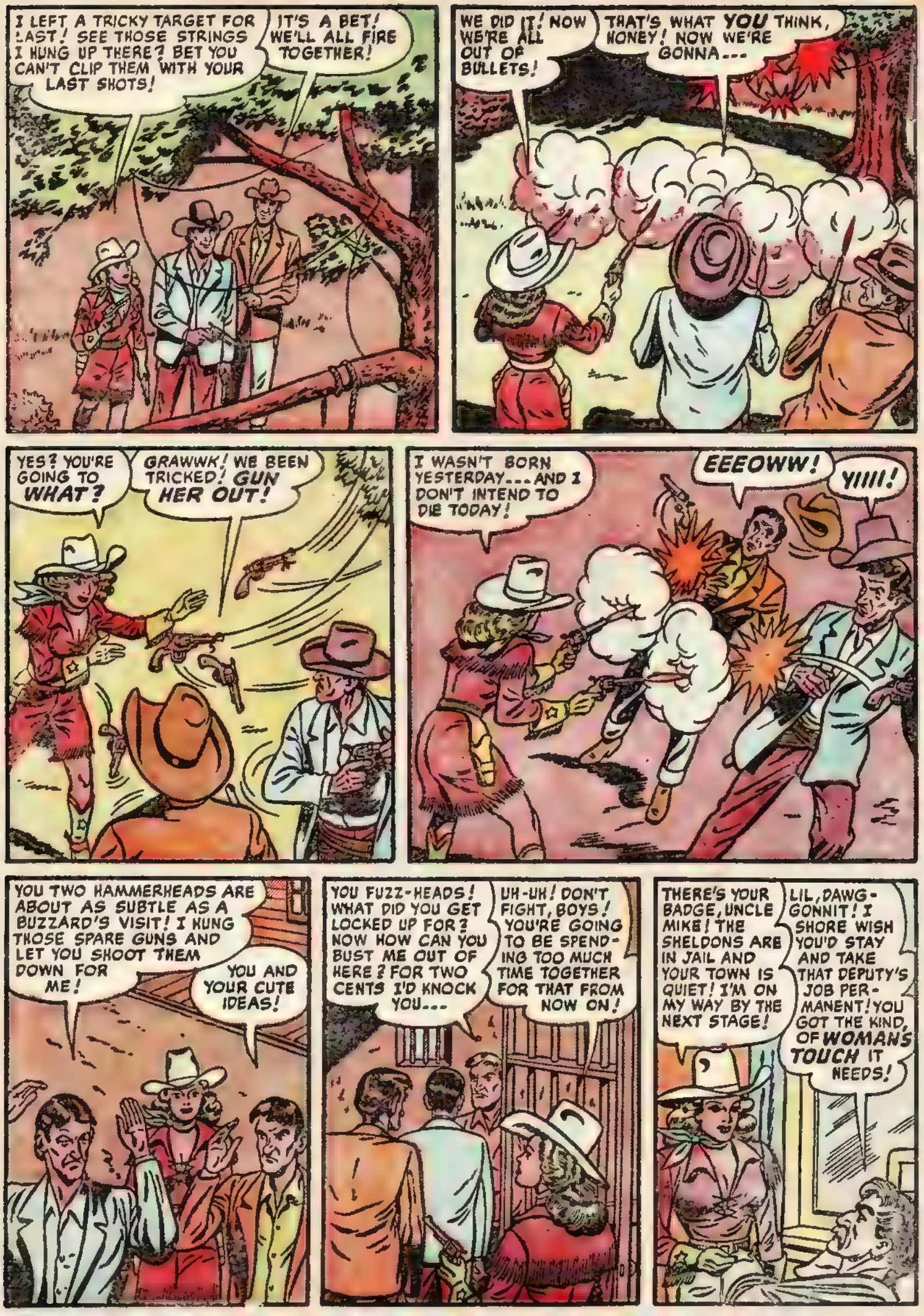
SHERIFF MIKE PETERS TRIES TO SERVE A WARRANT ON ONE OF THE WILD SHELDON BROTHERS!
I WARN YUH, BAT SHELDON... AHHHH!
NICE SHOOTIN', BAT!
THAT TAKES CARE OF THE LAW AROUND HERE!
YEP! RECKON ALL WE GOTTA DO NOW IS TAKE OVER THE TOWN AND START RUNNIN' IT OUR WAY!
DOC SAYS I'LL BE LAID UP A MONTH, ED! LOOKS LIKE IT UP TO YOU, AS MY DEPUTY, TO ARREST THEM SHELDON BUZZARDS!
OH, NO! IF THEY KIN OUTDRAW YOU, I WOULDN'T HAVE A CHANCE! I'M RESIGNING, HERE AND NOW!
NO MAN ALIVE CAN MATCH LIL PETERS BLAZING SIX-GUNS! BUT WHEN A PAIR OF SAVAGE KILLERS CATCH LIL WITH HER GUNS EMPTY, HER ONLY HOPE OF SURVIVAL IS TO WAIT FOR A PAIR OF...
"Six-Guns From The Sky!"


A SHORT TIME LATER, ON THE INCOMING STAGE...
SHERIFF MIKE'LL SHORE BE TICKLED TO SEE YUH, LIL! THE OLD BUZZARD TALKS ABOUT YOU ALL THE TIME!
MIKE'S AN OLD DEAR! THAT'S WHY I DECIDED TO PAY HIM A SURPRISE VISIT ON MY WAY SOUTH!
WELL, WHADDAYUH KNOW, BOYS! THE STAGE LINE'S DELIVERIN' OUR FIRST PAYROLL RIGHT INTO OUR HANDS! TOSS THAT CHEST DOWN, POP!
YOU GO SLUICE A GOOSE! THIS HERE MONEY BOX AIN'T GOING TO NOBODY BUT BEN HALL THE BANKER!
LOOK, BURT AND BOYD---HE WANTS TO PLAY WITH US!
WELL, WE DON'T MIND A LITTLE GUN GAME! YOU WANT FIRST SHOT AT HIM, BAT?
YOU'RE TOO SLOW FOR FIRST SHOT, BUZZARD-BAIT! I'LL TAKE OVER!
EEEEAH!
MY HAND!
OWW!
I TAKE IT YOU COYOTES WERE JUST FUNNING! NOW RUN ALONG AND WE'LL FORGET IT THIS TIME!
MAYBE YOU THINK YOU'LL FORGET IT, SISTER, BUT YOU WON'T!
WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU PEOPLE? WHERE'S UNCLE MIKE?
D-DOWN AT THE DOC'S OFFICE, MISS LIL! Y-YOU BETTER HURRY DOWN AND GET THE STORY STRAIGHT FROM HIM!
A FEW MINUTES LATER...
...AND THET'S THE STORY, LIL! THEY'RE TOO TOUGH AND FAST FER ANY DEPUTY I GOT TO TANGLE WITH! WE'RE HELPLESS!
MAYBE YOU ARE BUT I'M NOT! GIVE ME THAT BADGE AND SWEAR ME IN! I'LL TAKE CARE OF THOSE SMART SHELDON SIDEWINDERS MYSELF!

WHERE ARE THOSE POLECATS THAT WALK ON TWO LEGS, PARDNER?
R-RIGHT OVER THERE IN THE L-LONE STAR, MISS LIL! BUT BE KEERFUL!
LONE STAR SALOON
BLACKSM
THERE YOU ARE! BAT SHELDON, YOU'RE UNDER ARREST!
TRY AND TAKE ME! LAST TIME YOU CAUGHT ME BY SURPRISE...!
YIIIIKE!
I'VE CAUGHT YOU AGAIN! DON'T TELL ME YOU STILL ARE SURPRISED?
START MARCHING TO JAIL! YOU, TOO, YOU BUZZARD'S BROTHERS!
NOW HOLD ON, LADY! WE AIN'T DONE NOTHING! THERE AIN'T NO LAW ABOUT BEING BROTHERS, IS THERE?
I GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT! YOU'RE IN THE CLEAR SO FAR, BUT I'M KEEPING AN EYE ON YOU! DON'T TRY ANYTHING FUNNY!
DON'T WORRY! WHEN WE TRY SUMP'N, IT WON'T BE FUNNY... FOR YOU!
WHAT ARE WE GONNA DO, BERT? WE GOTTA GUN THAT SMART GAL OUT AND GET BAT FREE AGAIN!
OH, SURE! WHO'S GONNA MATCH GUNS WITH HER? NOT ME, BOYD! SHE OUTDREW BAT AND HE'S FASTER THAN EITHER OF US!
I GOT AN IDEA! IF WE COULD FIGURE SOME WAY TO CATCH THAT FAST-SHOOTING CYCLONE WITH HER GUNS EMPTY...!
AND I KNOW HOW TO DO IT! NOW LISTEN CLOSE, AND DON'T MISS ON THIS!

A SHORT TIME LATER...
YEAH? WHAT DO YOU TWO APE'S UNCLES WANT?
MA'AM, WE SURE DO ADMIRE YOUR GUN-SPEED! BUT WE BEEN THINKIN', WE BET YOU AIN'T AS FAST AS MY BROTHER BERT, HERE!
OH, NO, MA'AM! NOT LIKE THAT! WE JEST FIGGERED MEBBE A KIND OF CONTEST, LIKE, TO SEE WHICH OF US IS FASTER!
SURE! BOYD MEANS, HOW ABOUT A SHOOTING MATCH WITH SIX-GUNS, YOU AGAINST BOYD, WITH SOME KIND OF TARGETS!
HMM! ALL RIGHT, BOYS! I'M BUSY RIGHT NOW BUT SUPPOSE I MEET YOU OUT AT THE HANGING COTTONWOOD IN TWO HOURS?
PERFECT! WE'LL BE THERE IN TWO HOURS!
IT WORKED! WE GOT THAT SMART SISTER RIGHT WHERE WE WANT HER, BERT!
WE SURE HAVE, BOYD! WE'LL TRICK HER INTO SHOOTING UNTIL HER GUNS ARE EMPTY! THEN WE'LL GUN HER OUT AND TAKE OVER THE TOWN!
WE'LL BUST BAT OUTA JAIL AND REALLY TAKE THIS TOWN FOR PLENTY!
NOW, WHAT DO YOU SUPPOSE THOSE YELLOW-BACKED SIDEWINDERS ARE COOKING UP?
THERE'S A TRICK TO IT SOMEWHERE, BUT I CAN'T FIGURE WHERE! THERE'S NO PLACE FOR AN AMBUSH HERE!
THIS IS PERFECT! SHE'LL SHOOT ALL HER BULLETS AND FIGURE WE DONE THE SAME!
I WANNA SEE HER FACE WHEN WE PULL THESE HIDEOUT GUNS!
4


TWO HOURS LATER...
ALL SET FOR OUR SHOOTING MATCH?
READY AND WAITING! ONLY I'VE GOT A LITTLE RULE OF MY OWN TO GOVERN THIS CONTEST, BOYS!
JUST SO WE ALL RUN OUT OF BULLETS TOGETHER, WE'LL ALL SHOOT TOGETHER! MAKE IT A THREE-WAY CONTEST!
WHY, SURE, MISS LIL! THAT SUITS US JUST FINE! SHALL WE GET STARTED? WHAT ABOUT TARGETS?
I SET UP THOSE BOTTLES! THERE ARE TWO APIECE! SOMEBODY COUNT TO THREE!
I'LL COUNT! ONE! TWO...!
THREE!
WE'RE EVEN ON THAT! NOW LET'S TRY THAT ROW 'WAY OVER THERE!
FIRE ON THE COUNT!
WE'RE STILL EVEN!
YOU BOYS ARE PRETTY HANDY WITH THE SHOOTING IRONS, AT THAT!
THE SHOOTING MATCH GOES ON UNTIL...
THIS'LL BE THE LAST SHOT! WHEN HER GUNS ARE EMPTY, DRAW OUR HOLDOUT GUNS AND LET HER HAVE IT!
LET'S GO, BOYS! WE'VE ONLY GOT ONE BULLET LEFT IN EACH GUN!
5


I LEFT A TRICKY TARGET FOR LAST! SEE THOSE STRINGS I HUNG UP THERE? BET YOU CAN'T CLIP THEM WITH YOUR LAST SHOTS!
IT'S A BET! WE'LL ALL FIRE TOGETHER!
WE DID IT! NOW WE'RE ALL OUT OF BULLETS!
THAT'S WHAT YOU THINK, HONEY! NOW WE'RE GONNA---
YES? YOU'RE GOING TO WHAT?
GRAWWK! WE BEEN TRICKED! GUN HER OUT!
I WASN'T BORN YESTERDAY... AND I DON'T INTEND TO DIE TODAY!
EEEOWW!
YIIII!
YOU TWO HAMMERHEADS ARE ABOUT AS SUBTLE AS A BUZZARD'S VISIT! I HUNG THOSE SPARE GUNS AND LET YOU SHOOT THEM DOWN FOR ME!
YOU AND YOUR CUTE IDEAS!
YOU FUZZ-HEADS! WHAT DID YOU GET LOCKED UP FOR? NOW HOW CAN YOU BUST ME OUT OF HERE? FOR TWO CENTS I'D KNOCK YOU...
UH-UH! DON'T FIGHT, BOYS! YOU'RE GOING TO BE SPENDING TOO MUCH TIME TOGETHER FOR THAT FROM NOW ON!
THERE'S YOUR BADGE, UNCLE MIKE! THE SHELDONS ARE IN JAIL AND YOUR TOWN IS QUIET! I'M ON MY WAY BY THE NEXT STAGE!
LIL, DAWG-GONNIT! I SHORE WISH YOU'D STAY AND TAKE THAT DEPUTY'S JOB PERMANENT! YOU GOT THE KIND, OF WOMAN'S TOUCH IT NEEDS!

The FEUD

"DOWN!" shrieked Gordon in Harry Dalby's ear. "Keep your head down!"

Waaaammm!

A ·45 slug hummed diagonally across the street of the little Missouri frontier town, splintered the shutter of a window and then ricocheted, to finish up as a blob of lead far closer to the four travellers than was pleasant. A second and a third shot followed, but these seemed to mark the end of the fusillade of shots, at least for the time being.

"Now!" said Gordon, plucking at Dick Barrington's sleeve. "Keep down and make for that lean-to over there. It will be better than no shelter at all. Ready?"

T., D. and H. nodded and scampered like crabs across the dusty roadway to gain the comparative shelter of a little shed used, as the boys discovered, as a storehouse by Perkins, the one and only hardware merchant of Two Trees. There, crouching behind a number of empty barrels that had once contained molasses, all four were able to get their breath as the sound of shooting started up again.

"What is it?" gasped Tom Hall. "Has war broken out?"

Gordon Gregory mopped his streaming forehead and closed his eyes. "Not broken out," he said, "still going on. Listen, it sometimes happens that—that things pile up on me and get right out of hand. This is one of those times. When we left the Lazy Y and Larry Shuter I planned to take you to an Indian reservation; I had an idea you might like to smoke a pipe of peace with the great Cochise. . . ."

"Gosh!" exploded Harry, for one reason because, like most fellows, the very idea

of meeting the famous Indian Chief took his breath away and for another reason because, even as Gordon spoke, a bullet tore its way across the top of the lean-to and thudded against a wall.

"We'll have to get out as soon as we can," grunted Gordon. "The fighting's drifting this way. However, as I was saying, something went wrong and we've landed, so far as I can judge, bang in the middle of the last gun-fight of the famous Hatfield-McCoy feud. Ever heard of it?"

It was Dick who answered.

"Rather," he said, "but I'm a bit hazy about it. Lots of McCoys and Hatfields were killed, weren't they?"

Gordon, who now had his eyes open and into whose cheeks colour was beginning to come back, nodded. "Mostly McCoys," he said. "It started sometime during the Civil War and it was—*is*, so far as we're concerned at this minute—one of the most savage of all the American mountain vendettas. The Hatfields come from Williamson County, West Virginia, and Anse Hatfield and his kinsmen got involved in a quarrel with the McCoys of Kentucky. The feud proper started ten years ago, in 1880, when a fool McCoy accused a Hatfield of stealing a half-wild hog belonging to old man Randolph McCoy."

"Go on!" begged Tom Hall.

"Well," continued Gordon, as he crawled back from an inspection of the street outside through a crack in the wall of the shed. "Two years later, three sons of Randolph McCoy were seized by a squad of Hatfields, who'd got a constable and a justice of the peace with them, arrested for a killing they didn't do and brutally slugged. That——" He broke off as the shooting flared up and the four were compelled to burrow into the collection of empty barrels, old tins and whatnots in the lean-to. "Give me that pickaxe head, Dick!" he ordered.

Dick handed it over and with an exhibition of strength that never failed to astonish his friends Gordon crashed a hole in the end of the lean-to. "Follow me!" he yelled. "I'm making for the Western Star Hotel."

A moment later the four were outside again and running blindly, with Gordon in the lead. Shots criss-crossed over them, there were raucous shouts, and once there came the shrill scream of a woman. Then a set of wooden steps loomed up out of the whirling dust whipped up by a stiff breeze blowing from the Kentucky border. The fugitives clattered up the steps and Gordon hammered on a closed door.

"Who's there?"

Gordon took a chance. "McCoys!" he yelled.

The door swung back and they were dragged into the lobby of the barricaded hotel. A tall man grabbed Dick Barrington by the slack of his shirt, almost lifted him from the ground and peered into his face. "You ain't a McCoy, kid!" he hissed. "Out with it. Who the heck are you?"

Dick tried to say something, but the words stuck in his throat. He'd been scared quite a number of times on those fantastic tours of the Wild and Woolly West with Gordon, but this time he felt the hairs at the back of his neck rise as terror seized his whole being.

"Easy, Randolph!" came Gordon's voice. "He's a buddy of mine."

The iron fingers gripping Dick Barrington relaxed and the prisoner wriggled free.

"Gordon!" snapped Randolph McCoy. "Where the heck did you spring from?"

T., D. and H.'s friend shrugged. "I guess I had you on my mind, Mr. McCoy," he

drawled. "Anyway, here I am and it's not much less than a miracle that any of us got into the Western Star alive. How many Hatfields out there?"

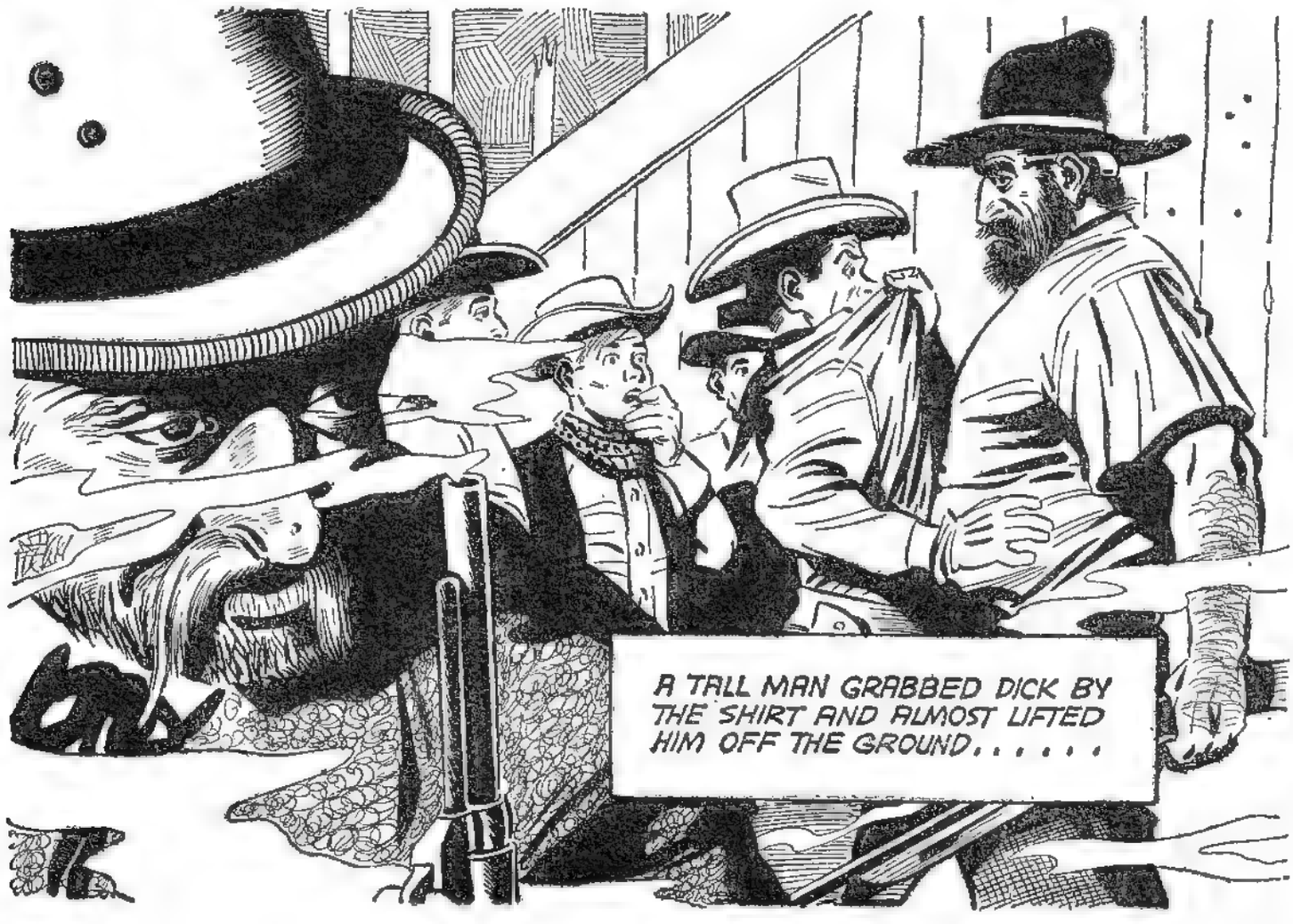
"All of 'em!" rasped the tall man. "The last of 'em." He motioned the four to follow him to a table in a corner of the hotel lobby. It was during the journey to that table that Tom, Dick and Harry noticed that the room contained a round dozen men, all armed with rifles and lying prone on the dirty floor below loopholes in the shutters. Even as the corner table was gained there came a burst of firing from outside, followed instantly by a furious retaliation from the defenders of Two Trees' only hotel. "Clem!" bawled Randolph McCoy. "Coffee. Scalding and as black as a thundercloud." He lit up a long black cigar and remained silent, except for a monotonous drumming of the table with stubby finger-tips, until a man in shirt-sleeves and a worried expression appeared with the coffee.

"Go on, Mr. McCoy!" invited Gordon, sipping the scalding black liquid.

"Waal," drawled the other. "It's two years ago since the McCoys thought they'd ended this plumb loco feud. Y'll remember that officers from Kentucky made raids into West Virginia, slugged Gem and Wilson Hatfield and nabbed nine other of the devil's brood. Two of them fellers were executed and we figgered that there weren't no more left likely to cause trouble. 'Pears that we were wrong." He nodded towards the front of the building. "There's near twenty of them out there, less those we've plugged. The Hatfields die hard, Gordon, and I guess if this doesn't finish the whole durned business, then it'll finish me. You ain't forgetting that them fellers killed three of my boys. Good boys they were, Mister, mighty fine boys."

Gordon looked at the speaker.

"Sure!" grunted Randolph McCoy. "We've done bad things, too, but not without



cause. I'll tell you this, though, we didn't come clear across Kentucky looking for those fellows out there; they came lookin' for us. Now——" The speaker crashed a fist on the table and made the coffee cups rattle. "Now we've got to get 'em." He paused. "Any ideas?"

Gordon considered. "Can you give me the set-up, Mister? I can't say I've ever hit Two Trees before, but it looks a one-horse township to me."

"It's that, all right," agreed McCoy. Then he produced a stub of pencil and began to draw on the rough wood of the table. "There's the Western Star——" He sketched a square. "And there's what's left of the Hatfields." And he stabbed some twenty times in a circle round the hotel. "Less those we got, of course!" he finished. "Seems to me there's only one thing to do and that's to sit tight and plug any guy who's plumb foolish enough to show himself."

"Where's the sheriff?"

"Pulled out at sun-up, right after the Hatfield fellers got into town—shooting!" The leader of the McCoy clan paused. "Any other ideas?" he asked.

Gordon hesitated, passed a hand wearily across his forehead and then nodded. "Yes," he snapped. "We're staging an evacuation of the Western Star."

Randolph McCoy knocked over his chair as he sprang to his feet. "Y'r loco," he snapped. "I ain't pullin' out. No, sir! I'm not leavin' Two Trees 'til the Hatfields are wiped out. It ain't no good arguing."

"I said we're *staging* an evacuation," rasped Gordon. "That's different to leaving. Listen, there's a back way out, huh? A way into that clear space at the rear of the hotel, I mean? Just give me a clear answer, man, that's all I want."

"Yes—there's a back way out!"

"Good!" Gordon looked at his three companions. "Get busy and make seven or eight dummies. . . ."

"Dummies?"

The other grinned. "Yes, dummies, *dummies*! Use bolsters, sacks filled with straw, anything you can get hold of. Dress 'em as best you can." He leaned forward and spoke in a low voice. "If I could get the lot of us out of here any other way I'd do it, chaps, but I can't. Reckon it'll take an hour for me to get straightened out inside——" He tapped his chest. "But we could be dead in an hour—or rather *you* three could —and that means we've got to get away. Now, get busy. Hey!" He called to the shirt-sleeved man, Clem, and gave a string of orders.

"Surely!" grunted that worthy, a gleam of hope dispelling some of the worried wrinkles on his homely face. "We got just what you want, Mister! I'll be right back."

"No!" Gordon stopped him. "Take my buddies with you."

It was nearly twenty minutes before T., D. and H. came back with half a dozen dummies amazingly like dead men. During that period there had geen a great deal of activity outside. A bunch of horsemen had ridden rein-loose by the hotel, firing from the hip as they galloped by. Two saddles had been emptied by the defenders, but the rest of the crazy riders had got clean away, to return by a roundabout route to take up their old positions surrounding the battle-scarred Western Star Hotel.

"O.K.," grunted Gordon. "Now this is my plan. Give me seven men, Randolph, and we'll leave by that back door as if we're trying to make a getaway with the wounded. Savvy?"

"Sure I savvy," came the reply, "but you won't get three yards."

IT WAS NEARLY TWENTY MINUTES BEFORE T., D., AND H. CAME BACK WITH A HALF DOZEN DUMMIES AMAZINGLY LIKE DEAD MEN...

"We'll take that chance," answered Gordon, "but remember that these bolsters will make mighty handy shields. Point is, however, that the Hatfields and their pals will converge on that clear space back of the hotel. When they do, you'll come out with my pals and the rest of your men and turn the tables on those guys outside. Wait!" he added imperiously, as a smile illumed the face of Randolph McCoy. "I want as little killing as possible. I guess those fellows will know enough to see that the game's up, and if they've any sense they'll surrender. Unless you give me your promise not to kill unnecessarily, then you'll have to take your chance—alone. Well?"

The grim-faced man, whose life had been ruined by a terrible but stupid feud, nodded.

"O.K.," he said. "Sure! Here's my hand on it!" And a large, well-shaped hand was stretched across the scarred table.

It took very little time to set the stage, and as things were being prepared Gordon had time for a word with T., D. and H. "Listen," he said seriously. "I've muffed it this time and I'm sorry, but I still want your promise to keep well back when the time comes. Anyway," he finished, "don't take any plumb foolish risks."

Dick spoke for the three of them. "We won't," he said. Then he shrugged. "I guess this is pretty serious!" he added. "Isn't it?"

Gordon Gregory nodded. "Yes," he said slowly, "it is—rather." Then he turned aside. "Ready, fellows?" he asked.

Heads were nodded.

Two minutes went by, time spent in making certain that everyone knew what was expected of him. Then Gordon spun the chambers of his Colt and snapped it shut. "Right!" he jerked out. "Let's go!"

Tom, Dick and Harry watched their friend and the seven men go out of a small door in the rear of the lobby, with mixed feelings. They had no anxiety about the safety of Gordon himself, but they couldn't help wondering what might happen if things did not turn out the way their strange friend expected. Supposing that the Hatfield faction saw through the trick; supposing they remained at the front as well as at the back of the hotel; supposing they—— But what was the good of supposing? The door crashed shut, and seconds later the boys heard the squeaking of unoiled hinges as the outer door was pulled back.

"Come on!" rasped Randolph McCoy. He dropped to the floor and, as the others followed suit, wriggled his way across the littered floor towards the front door. He raised himself an inch or two and called over his shoulder. "They're making for the back, boys, I reckon it's . . ."

Crash! Crash! Crash! Crash!

A volley of shots came from the rear of the hotel and, through a hole at the side of the front door, Dick Barrington saw men running, firing as they ran.

Then the door crashed open and they were pelting down the steps and swerving to the right. Tom Hall saw Randolph McCoy lift a Hatfield's Stetson off its owner's head and then saw him use a six-gun as a club to knock his enemy senseless but quite capable of recovery in due course. Neither Tom, Dick nor Harry saw much after that. They seemed to be in the middle of the fighting and yet, wonder of wonders, felt no fear. All they felt was excitement, the tingling excitement that comes from action after nothing but waiting. It is the kind of thing that comes to every soldier in battle after days of waiting for the enemy to move. Fear departs and only excitement remains.

The noise was deafening and the dust rose in clouds. "Tom!" Dick grabbed his friend's arm. "Where's *Gordon*? Have you seen *Gordon*?"

Tom shook his head.

"*Dick—Dick——*"

The cry could not be mistaken. It came from close to the back of the Western Star Hotel.

"Where are you?" The leader of the three Colden College fellows looked wildly around. Then he saw Gordon Gregory hugging a dummy to his chest and with his back to a wooden wall. Right in front of him was a Hatfield, a sallow-skinned man with a hat that covered the back of his neck, and he was firing with a repeating rifle from the hip. "Coming!" screamed Tom, Dick and Harry. "Coming!" Tom turned and practically drove his two companions before him through the press of men, some already with their hands held high above their heads in token of surrender. How long it took the three to reach Gordon Gregory they never knew, but it was Tom Hall who, using a six-gun as a club, sent the Hatfield man to sleep for nineteen hours, to wake up with the father and mother of headaches.

"Your hands!" groaned Gordon, dropping the dummy and swaying on his feet. "We've got to try to make it. The—the plan isn't all that successful. *Ready?*" And he groped for his friends' hands. For a matter of seconds nothing happened; the sounds of the end of the notorious Hatfield-McCoy feud, that developed into a real war, sounded as clear as ever. Then, like the working of a dentist's injection, the effect of Gordon's concentration was felt by the boys. The whole earth rocked about them, there was a roaring sound, darkness grew. . . . The little frontier town of Two Trees was lost in the mists of time and the four went winging to safety.

"Hold on!" came Gordon's voice. "*Hold—on!*"

Completely recovering, Gordon raced Tom, Dick and Harry into the depths of Arizona to the camp of an Apache tribe. There they were made welcome and joined in the Indian game of "Shaking-the-bowl".

SHAKING-THE-BOWL

A Real INDIAN Game!

"Shaking-the-bowl" was originally an Iroquois game and has been played for hundreds of years. In ancient times the special bowl used was either carved out of a solid knot of wood or woven from reeds. Measuring six to twelve inches across the top and with a flat bottom, such a bowl is not now specially made and might, in fact, be used for other purposes when not required for the game.

The game-stones and counters are still made and owned by players, however, and a set of such stones consists of six peach, plum or cherry stones burnt or blackened on one side. Sometimes the fruit stones are used just as they come from the peaches, plums or cherries, but the larger stones are usually worn down to a smaller size before one side is blackened.

For the one to three hundred counters that make up a set, the Indians use beans, cherry stones or pieces of reed about an inch in length.

Shaking-the-bowl is a game for two players, but one can often see a dozen pairs playing at the same time in an Indian camp. The players sit facing each other with the bowl, holding the six game-stones, placed between them. As for the counters, they are laid in a pile at one side within easy reach of both players. Having decided which shall go first, a player takes hold of the upper rim of the bowl in both hands and, lifting it a little, brings it sharply down on the ground.

Instantly, as one can imagine, the game-stones leap into the air and then fall back into the bowl again. The player's score depends on how his stones lie after they have fallen back into the bowl.

Here are the scores:

1. All white or all black = 5 points = a "field".

2. Five white and one black = 1 point = a "bird".

3. Five black and one white = 1 point = a "bird".

These are the only combinations that count and the player goes on shaking the bowl so long as he scores. If, for instance, the player's game-stones fall in any other way to the above, then he tosses the bowl to his opponent, who catches it and takes his turn.

As a rule the player who is not shaking the bowl makes faces and shouts good-naturedly in the hope of distracting his opponent and putting him off his stroke.

Scoring is very simple. As soon as a player throws a "field" or a "bird", he takes the winning number of counters out of the common pool until all have been divided between the two. After that a player takes his score from his opponent's pile until one of the two has gained them all. He is, of course, the winner of the game.

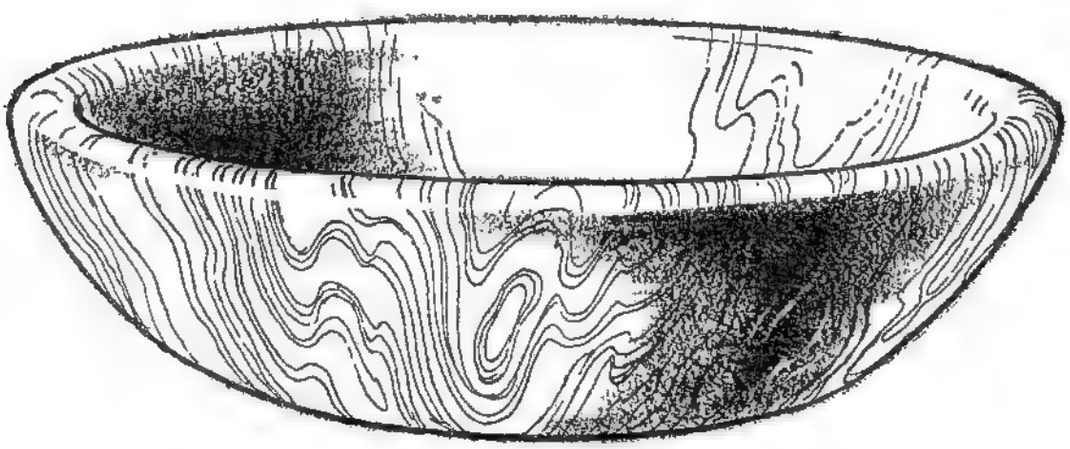
It should be mentioned that there is no need to paint the opposite side of a game-stone white, its natural colour is usually called "white" as distinct from the blackened side.

Shaking-the-bowl, as T., D. and H. quickly found, can be most exciting, and they were not surprised to hear that it has been played by Indians for over four hundred years, or that in the olden days when all America belonged to the Indians they used to hold great tournaments of Shaking-the-bowl. One village would send a formal challenge to another and, on the appointed day, hundreds of excited spectators would follow a champion bowl-shaker for miles through the forest to watch a contest.

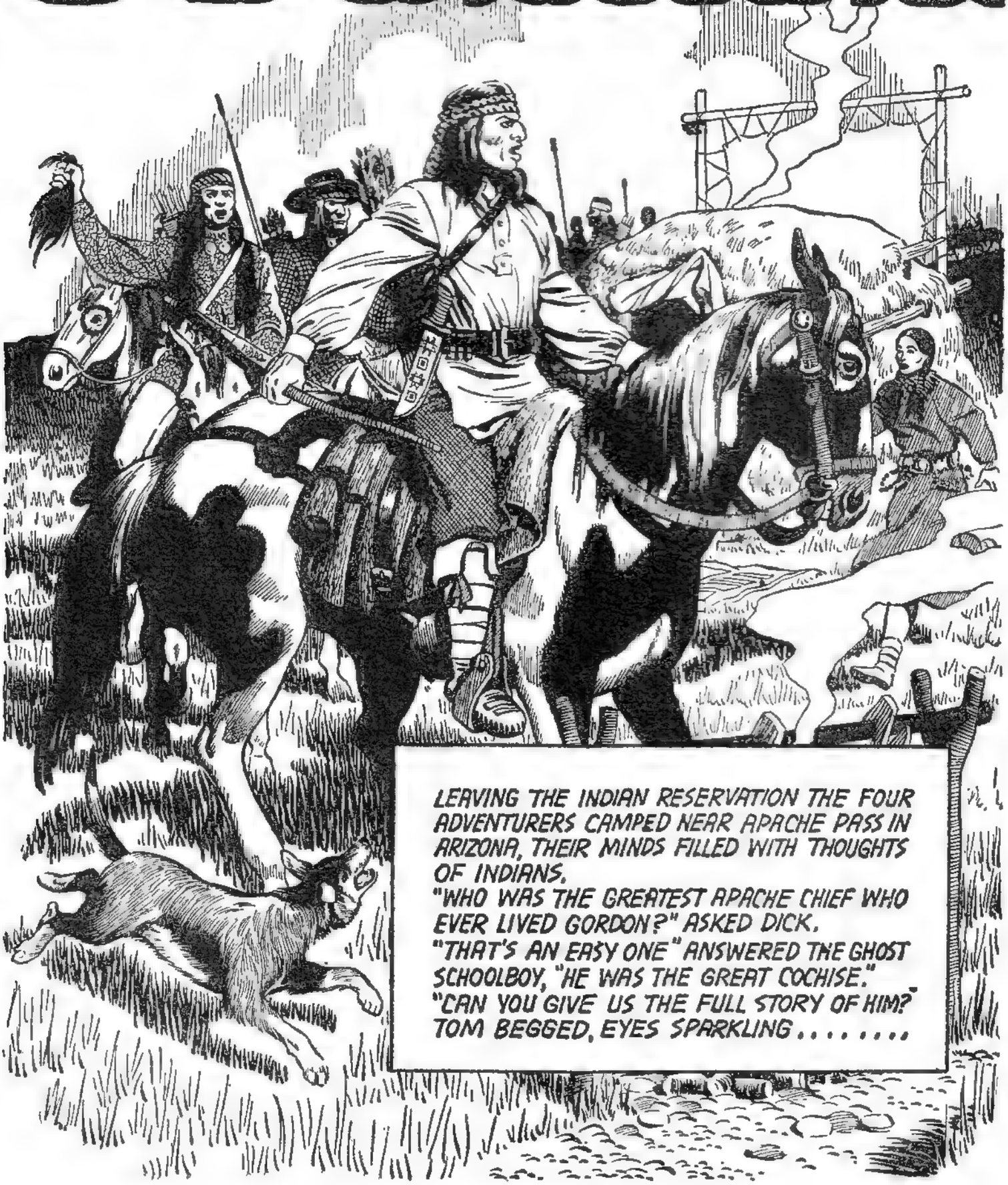
Arriving on the scene, the spectators spread their blankets for their champion and then stood in a crowd behind him shouting and grimacing at his rival until the air rang with their shouts of: "Bub—bub—bub—bub. . . ." Indeed, it is said that our word "hubbub" comes from the shouts of the Indians when playing the game of Shaking-the-bowl.

It should be added that Indians have never applauded their champions personally as people do in other parts of the world. A man played not for himself but for his village, and his victory fell, not upon himself, but upon all his people. At the end of every game there was always a feast and a dance and then the villagers trooped off home through the forest, either joyfully because of their victory or, perhaps, a little sadly because of a defeat.

Anyway, Tom, Dick and Harry discovered that Shaking-the-bowl is as exciting a game as any they had played.



The Great COCHISE



LEAVING THE INDIAN RESERVATION THE FOUR ADVENTURERS CAMPED NEAR APACHE PASS IN ARIZONA, THEIR MINDS FILLED WITH THOUGHTS OF INDIANS.
"WHO WAS THE GREATEST APACHE CHIEF WHO EVER LIVED GORDON?" ASKED DICK.
"THAT'S AN EASY ONE" ANSWERED THE GHOST SCHOOLBOY, "HE WAS THE GREAT COCHISE."
"CAN YOU GIVE US THE FULL STORY OF HIM?" TOM BEGGED, EYES SPARKLING.....

"WHEN STILL A YOUNG MAN COCHISE HELD A MEETING OF HIS TRIBE, THE CHIRICAHUA APACHES," SAID GORDON, "AND EXPLAINED THEY WOULD HAVE TO SETTLE DOWN TO CATTLE-RAISING LIKE THE PALEFACES WHO HAD INVADED THE REDMAN'S LAND."

MY BROTHERS, WE MUST WANDER NO MORE!

MY BRAVES WILL SUPPLY THE STAGECOACH DEPOT WITH WOOD FOR BURNING. IT IS WELL. WE ARE FRIENDS!

YES, GREAT CHIEF, WE ARE SURELY FRIENDS PEACE HAS COME TO ARIZONA. MAY IT LAST FOR EVER!

TIMETABLE

"IN OCTOBER 1860" SAID GORDON, "PEACE WAS SHATTERED BY THE KIDNAPPING OF A HALF-BREED BOY NAMED MICKY FREE BY SOME ROVING INDIANS....."

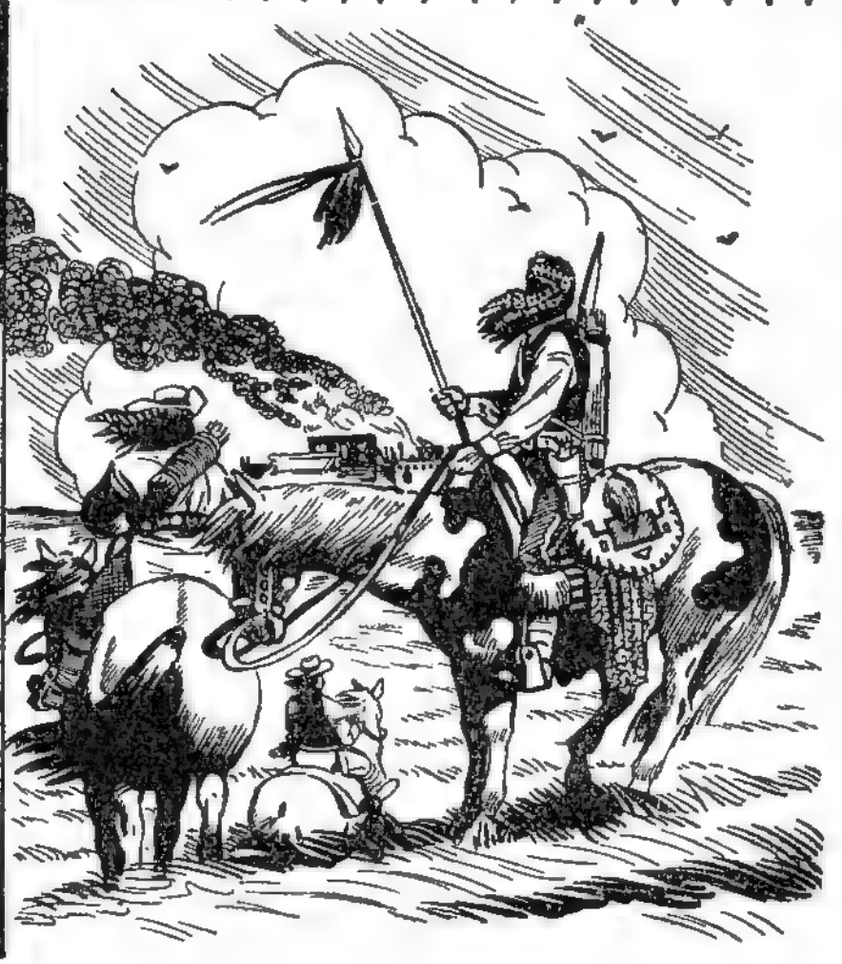
GET THIS TO COCHISE AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE!
"A LT. GEORGE BASCOM WAS IN CHARGE OF THE AMERICAN TROOPS AND HE LED A TROOP OUT OF FORT BUCHANAN TO SEARCH FOR MICKY," WENT ON GORDON, "HE PRESSED INTO THE APACHE PASS, HUNG A WHITE FLAG OVER HIS TENT AND SENT A MESSENGER TO INVITE COCHISE TO CONFER WITH HIM". . . . . .
YOU SPEAK WILDLY BOY, WE KNOW NOTHING OF THIS CHILD STERLING BUT I WILL HELP YOU TO FIND THE BOY!
YOU LIE, COCHISE!
YOU INSULT MY TRIBE AND ME. OUT OF MY WAY.... COME BROTHERS, WE CARE NOTHING FOR THE WHITE SOLDIERS!
HOLD THOSE MEN!
"TREACHERY FOLLOWED" DECLARED GORDON GRIMLY. "NO SOONER WAS COCHISE AND FIVE OF HIS FAMILY SEATED IN THE TENT THAN SOLDIERS SURROUNDED IT AND THE YOUNG ARROGANT OFFICER, UNUSED TO INDIAN FIGHTING, ACCUSED THE CHIEF OUTRIGHT OF KIDNAPPING MICKY FREE, DENYING IT, COCHISE DREW HIS KNIFE AND SLASHED HIS WAY THROUGH THE SIDE OF THE TENT!".....

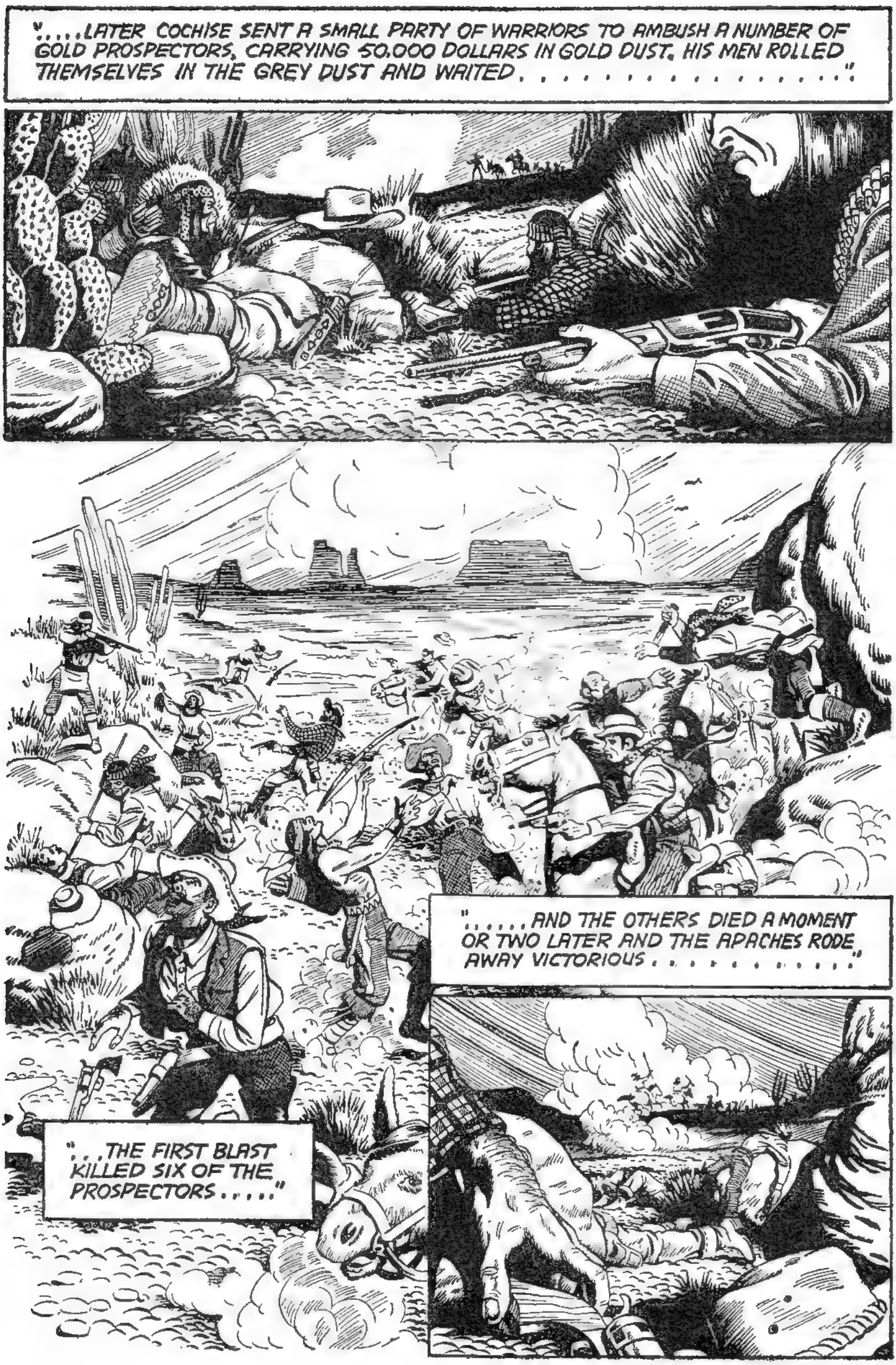
"COCHISE WAS WOUNDED BUT MANAGED TO ESCAPE." SAID GORDON. "BUT THE OTHERS WERE HELD PRISONER. NOW IT WAS WAR, THANKS TO THE STUPIDITY OF A YOUNG OFFICER FRESH FROM WEST POINT!"...

"TWO DAYS LATER COCHISE RETURNED TO TRY AND REASON WITH BASCOM AND TO ANNOUNCE THAT HE HAD CAPTURED SEVERAL WHITES IN RETALIATION".....

"WHITE AND RED PRISONERS WERE KILLED" SAID GORDON, "AND OPEN WAR WAS THE RESULT. COCHISE'S APACHES RAIDED THE SANTA RITA MINES AND STOLE 146 HORSES AND MULES FROM THE MINERS".....

GORDON GREGORY WENT ON WITH THE STORY. "THE MINERS FLED FROM THEIR TOWN OF TUBAC, WHICH WAS PROMPTLY BURNED BY THE APACHES. IT REMAINS A GHOST CITY TO THIS DAY".....




"....LATER COCHISE SENT A SMALL PARTY OF WARRIORS TO AMBUSH A NUMBER OF GOLD PROSPECTORS, CARRYING 50,000 DOLLARS IN GOLD DUST. HIS MEN ROLLED THEMSELVES IN THE GREY DUST AND WAITED. . . . . ."
"...THE FIRST BLAST KILLED SIX OF THE PROSPECTORS....."
"....AND THE OTHERS DIED A MOMENT OR TWO LATER AND THE APACHES RODE AWAY VICTORIOUS. . . . . ."

"THE SETTLERS PAID DEARLY FOR LT. BASCOMB'S OBSTINACY. BY 1871 THERE WERE ROUGHLY 15,000 WHITE CASUALTIES, MILLIONS... YES MILLIONS OF DOLLARS WORTH OF LIVESTOCK CAPTURED, RICH MINES ABANDONED, FARMS AND RANCHES LAID WASTE AND THE WHOLE SETTLEMENT OF THE SOUTHWEST HAD BEEN BROUGHT TO A STANDSTILL" GORDON SHOOK HIS HEAD. "NO FEWER THAN SIX GENERALS AND 5000 TROOPS WERE FIGHTING COCHISE'S TINY FORCE OF LESS THAN 1500 WARRIORS!"...
SOMETHING MUST BE DONE TO STOP COCHISE HOWARD!
I KNOW A MAN WHO MIGHT SUCCEED WHERE OTHERS FAILED...
IVE GOT TO SEE COCHISE AND STOP THESE KILLINGS!
"IN 1872 THINGS WERE SO SERIOUS" SAID GORDON "THAT GENERAL GRANT SUMMONED MAJ. GENERAL OLIVER HOWARD, A VETERAN OF THE CIVIL WAR TO HIS HEADQUARTERS. HOWARD IMMEDIATELY CONTACTED CAPTAIN JEFFORDS A MAIL-SUPERVISOR WHO, WHEN 16 OF HIS RIDERS HAD BEEN SLAUGHTERED BY APACHES, LEARNED THE APACHE LANGUAGE AND RODE ALONE TO SEE THE CHIEF . . . . . "

"COCHISE WAS SO IMPRESSED BY THE BEARING AND BRAVERY OF CAPTAIN JEFFORDS" SAID GORDON, "THAT HE HONOURED HIM BY MAKING HIM HIS BLOOD BROTHER. AFTER SEEING HOWARD, JEFFORDS AGREED TO TAKE HIM TO COCHISE PROVIDED HE CAME ALONE AND UNARMED. . . . . "
YOU MUST COME ALONE AND WITHOUT WEAPONS SIR!
I AGREE. THIS HORRIBLE WAR MUST CEASE!
. . . AND NOW WE ARE AT PEACE MY RED BROTHER.
A JUST PEACE! PEACE WITH HONOUR FOR MY PEOPLE!
". . . AND THAT IS THE END OF THE STORY" FINISHED GORDON. "THEY MET, PEACE WAS ARRANGED AND COCHISE FORSOOK THE WARPATH FOR EVER. . . . . "

THE Arizona sun seemed to bore through the scarf that Dick Barrington had adjusted to cover his neck, and the thought of sunstroke made him glance sideways at Gordon Gregory who hugged the ground only a foot or so away.

"Can't we get in the shade?" he asked.

Gordon shot a quick glance upwards at that blazing eye that gleamed in the blue dome of the sky. "Sure," he drawled. "I guess it's worse than I thought. Listen, fellows! When I give the word, wriggle forward half left to that big boulder but don't raise your body more than a foot from the ground and keep your heads well down. It's a chance, but we must take it. Get your breath and——" The speaker waited and counted ten. "Now!" he hissed.

The four fellows acted together and, seconds later, were in the shade of a roughly hewn boulder that dominated that section of the Chisum Trail from New Mexico clear through to the great San Carlos Apache Reservation in Arizona, not all that distance from the Gila River.

Gordon signed to his companions to keep still and, a moment later, was gone in that mysterious manner of his that wasn't plain unvarnished vanishing but a kind of silent, unseen withdrawal from any given spot. Tom Hall had time only to take off his wide-brimmed sombrero and mop his forehead before Gordon Gregory was back again.

"It's O.K. for the moment," he said. "Those durned Injuns are still there and it's a cinch the herders won't be able to spot them until it's too late. However, I calculate that we shan't see the head of the herd and be able to make contact with the point-

men for at least three hours. That means, chaps, we can take things easy, and I'll try to give you the whole set-up right from the beginning."

"Glad to hear that!" commented Harry Dalby dryly.

Dick and Tom remained silent.

"Well, it's like this," went on the fourth, and most important, member of the quartette, "it's a year or two after Cochise made peace, but the redmen we've just spotted waiting in ambush belong properly to the San Carlos Reservation. Cochise isn't in this at all. They're renegades who are itching to go on the warpath and, let me add, I can't exactly blame them."

"Why?" This in a startled voice from Dick.

"Plenty of reasons," came the reply. "There's a guy named Fellows at San Carlos and I guess he's the rottenest Indian Agent of all time. He's been robbing the Apaches left, right and centre and he's robbin' them right now. That Chisum herd that's heading this way from New Mexico stands between the Indians and near starvation. There are two thousand beeves and cows in this herd, and three more herds of equal size are due at two-week intervals later. Old man Chisum knows what he's doing, sure enough, but there's one thing he doesn't know and that is that his trail boss is hand-in-glove with Fellows. If most of those two thousand creatures don't get to the reservation on time, then the United States Government have got one heck of an Indian war on their hands all over again."

Dick Barrington whistled. "You mean that the Agent plans to have the herd rustled and that the trail boss isn't doing anything to stop the rustling?"

Gordon nodded. "That's it, exactly!" he commented. "If I'm not mistaken, Pete Skeffington—he's the trail boss—plans to collect a cool fifteen thousand dollars when the guys he's got lined up raid the herd at Panther Pass, a matter of two days' easy riding from here."

"Heck!" burst out Harry Dalby. "I don't get it. What have those Indians got to do with all this?" The speaker jerked a thumb in the rough direction of the small band of waiting redmen.

Gordon looked serious. "I was coming to that," he answered. "They're led by Scarlet Feather, one of the most dangerous Injuns in the whole durned South-west. Somehow he's found out about the plot to rustle most of this herd and he's made his own plans. Briefly, he'll do the rustling just before sundown, drive the cattle to Brilson Flats, leave some braves in charge and then get back to San Carlos with the story that the palefaces have robbed the tribe. After that it'll be simple; old Fleet Deer, the chief, won't be able to hold the four thousand-odd warriors at the reservation, the war drums will beat and there'll be war clear across Arizona—a war that might spread and grow to unmanageable proportions."

The others whistled softly and looked serious.

"How about the military on the Gila River?" asked Dick.

Gordon shrugged. "Not a chance," he answered. "Too few and too far away. Besides, there's more in Red Feather's plot than appears. Directly he's on the warpath he'll pretend that he knows where the white men have concealed the cattle and lead the Apaches to Brilson Flats. I guess that'll make him paramount chief over those four thousand braves and Fleet Deer's authority won't be worth a row of beads."

"What can we do?" asked Tom Hall.

"Ah!" Gordon became brisk at once. "I aim to warn the point-men of the herd when they get level with those twin rocks yonder——" The speaker pointed round

THE FOUR FELLOWS ACTED TOGETHER AND, SECONDS LATER, WERE IN THE SHADE OF A ROUGHLY HEWN ROCK THAT DOMINATED THAT SECTION OF THE CHISUM TRAIL.....

the side of the massive boulder at two towering masses of rocks about two or three miles away.

"But we'll be seen by the Indians!" protested Dick.

Gordon shook his head. "No!" he said. "The nature of the terrain will prevent that. I can't go into details, but that's the way it is. We'll have a clear ride, the way I see things. We will have to convince the point-men that Pete Skeffington is crooked, get them and the other herders to deal with the trail boss and then turn the herd south-east. By driving the creatures hard and fast there's a chance that they can get them to San Carlos right on time."

"Let's go!" cried Harry Dalby. "What are we waiting for?"

Gordon answered at once. "For the head of the herd to show up, Harry."

"But you said——" began the impatient Harry.

"A guy can surmise lots of things," interrupted Gordon. "He can be pretty nearly certain that things will happen the way he thinks they will, but he's got to be absolutely positive in affairs like this. Anything may happen, fellows, before the herd gets to those rocks. Mabbe Pete Skeffington has got wind of Red Feather's plans and will halt the herd; mabbe they've had trouble and are away behind; mabbe—but let's quit arguing. As I've told you many times before, I don't know everything, but I do know this: we wait until something moves by that first rock and then *we* move——" He paused. "But not before. O.K.?"

The other three nodded and, as one, turned to look towards another towering mass of rock close by where, as they knew, their ponies were securely ground-hitched and grazing on a patch of lush grass.

An hour passed fairly peacefully. Occasionally Gordon withdrew himself for a few minutes, but each time he returned he shook his head in dumb show and the three boys sighed as they prepared for a long wait. Their thoughts seethed as they spent that tedious period of waiting in various ways: Dick whittled away at a tiny carving, Tom scribbled in a small notebook and Harry scratched pictures in the dust with the point of a sharp stick. As for Gordon, when he wasn't keeping his eyes on the waiting band of Indians, bent on bringing about a fresh bid for the lands they still considered as theirs, and who were prepared to use the crookedness of an Indian Agent and one of John Chisum's trail bosses as an excuse to plunge the whole state of Arizona into war, he sat hunched up with eyes closed but obviously ready for instant action.

Action came suddenly when it did come. One moment Gordon sat motionless, the next he was on his feet.

"Come on!" he jerked out.

Dick Barrington was the only one of the three Colden fellows who was able to catch a glimpse of the vanguard of that herd, then all four had reached their ponies and, taking orders from Gordon, T., D. and H. clambered into their saddles and, at a signal, put spurs to their mounts and were away, zigzagging through the great boulders, plunging down slopes treacherous with loose stones, slithering round sharp bends in the trail and then pounding on in the wake of Gordon with their hearts hammering as strongly, so it seemed, as their ponies' hoofs.

For the first two hundred yards not one of the trio expected anything less than a shower of arrows, or rifle shots, from the watchful Apaches. Surely they must be able to see the horsemen? So argued Tom, Dick and Harry. But they did not have the experience in such matters as did Gordon Gregory and men used to such terrain. By choosing a place carefully, a hundred Indians frequently came within a few hundred

THEIR THOUGHTS SEETHED AS THEY SPENT THAT TEDIOUS PERIOD DOING MANY THINGS: DICK WHITTLED AWAY AT A TINY CARVING, TOM SCRIBBLED IN A SMALL NOTEBOOK AND HARRY SCRATCHED PICTURES IN THE DUST WITH A SHARP STICK.....

yards of those they wished to ambush without so much as a feathered head-dress being seen. The history of the Indian wars of the South-west is crammed with such stories and who, if not the amazing Gordon Gregory, would be better acquainted with such a thing?

Thus, after a matter of five minutes of hard riding, Tom, Dick and Harry were able to breathe freely again.

"Keep together!" shouted Gordon over his shoulder. "Don't go five yards either side of this trail. Savvy?"

The boys savvied all right and the desperate ride, now against time as well as against almost impossible terrain, went on until Tom Hall felt that he would have to yell blue murder if something didn't happen to relieve the awful tension.

"Halt!"

As if in a dream, T., D. and H. swept round a truly enormous towering mass of rock to see their leader reining-in his pony in a smother of white dust. Then, as they too pulled up, they saw the herd, fanning out as beeves and cows will on the trail, approaching in a long ragged line, with the four point-men—two on each side of the leading cattle—and, farther back, the swing-men riding on the flanks of the column.

Dick choked as the cloud of dust raised by the herd got down his throat. Gordon rode close to him and his voice was urgent and anxious as he spoke.

"Trouble, Dick," he shouted, above the noise of eight thousand hoofs, the shouting of the herders, the lowing of the cattle and, as if it were not enough, the rough mutter of distant thunder among the purple hills. "Find a point-man and explain things. Use tact, but don't obviously accuse Skeffington, just——" The speaker waved a finger

in an agitated manner quite foreign to his nature. "No! Don't argue, Dick, do what I—I tell you. Gosh! This is awful. Be seeing you!"

To the other fellow's amazement, Gordon suddenly raked his pony's flanks, caused the creature to rear alarmingly, tugged at the reins and was away, riding back in the direction they had come. It was all over in a flash and Dick, meeting Tom Hall's eye, made a face. "Now we're well and truly on our own, Tom," he said. "Let's go! *Harry!*" He raised his voice and Harry Dalby came cantering up to him.

"Yes?" His voice was testy.

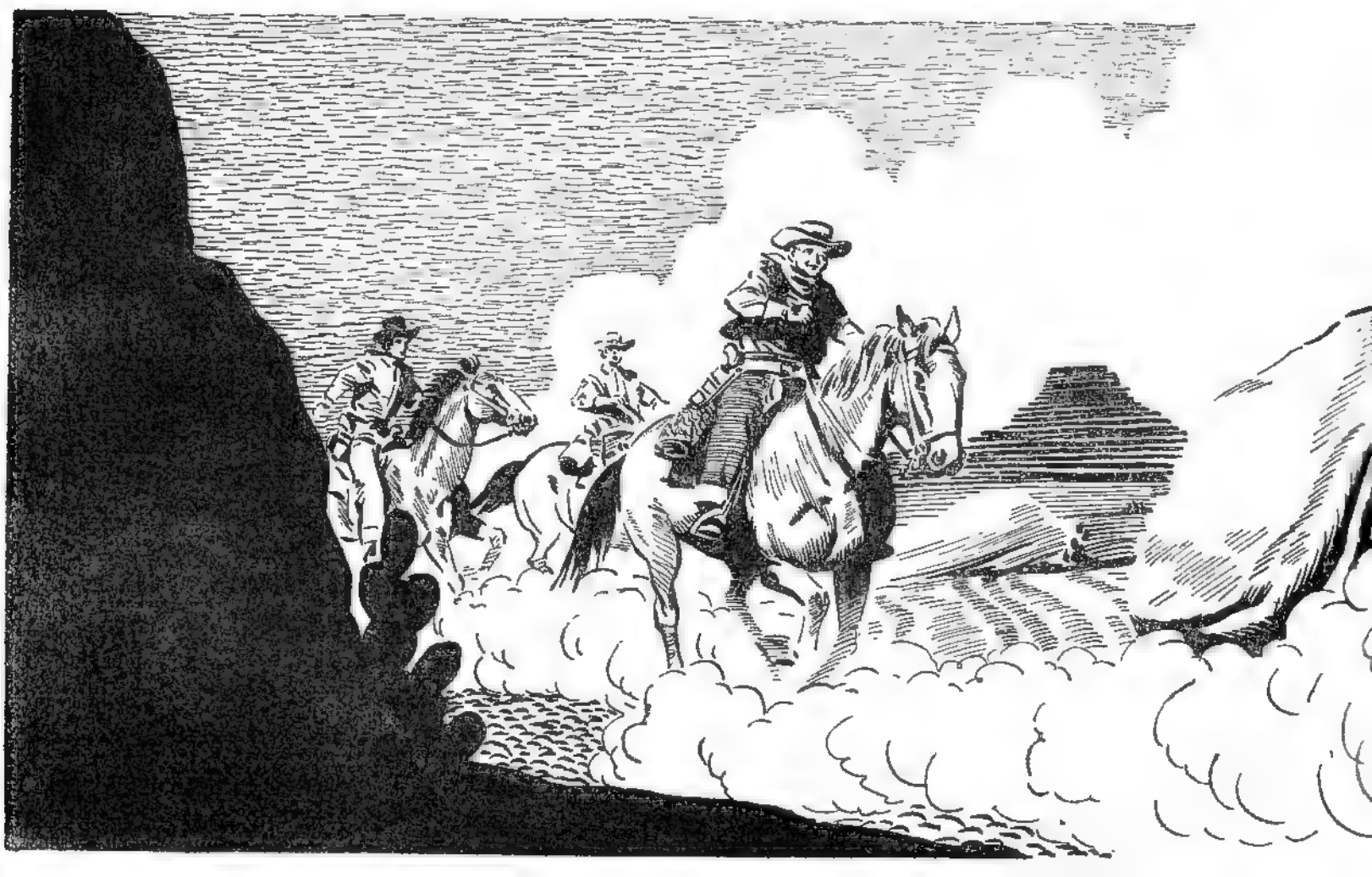
"Keep behind me," snapped Dick. "Gordon's left me in charge. Trouble somewhere. I think——" He broke off suddenly as he and his friends became aware of the approach of two point-men, riding rein-loose and with rifles across their knees. "Heck!" he added. "Here comes trouble with a big 'T'."

"Hey!" The leading rider rode up and the muzzle of his rifle was pointing straight at Dick's heart—that is, if the boy's heart hadn't durned nearly been in his boots at the time. "Who are you, kid? Keep y'r hands off them six-shooters of yours and speak up. Reckon I got the slippiest trigger-finger this side of Santa Fé. Now, let's have it!"

Dick's voice did not betray his emotions.

"No need for the gunplay, Mister," he drawled. "We're here to warn you. Apache Injuns aim to rustle the herd 'bout five miles from here. Reckon you'd best travel south-east and travel fast. Them savages"—Dick was forgetting all the grammar he had ever learnt—"look like breaking loose, and if anything happens to this herd the Gov'nment is likely to have one heck of a war on its hands and, what's more, you fellows ain't likely to keep y'r scalps for very long. I'm not foolin', Mister. . . ."

The second man had started as Dick began to explain why he was there; then he



had shot the other man a swift look of mingled surprise and suspicion—chiefly the latter. Now he half turned his restive mount and called over his shoulder, interrupting Dick in the middle of his sentence.

"How's about it, Pete?" he yelled.

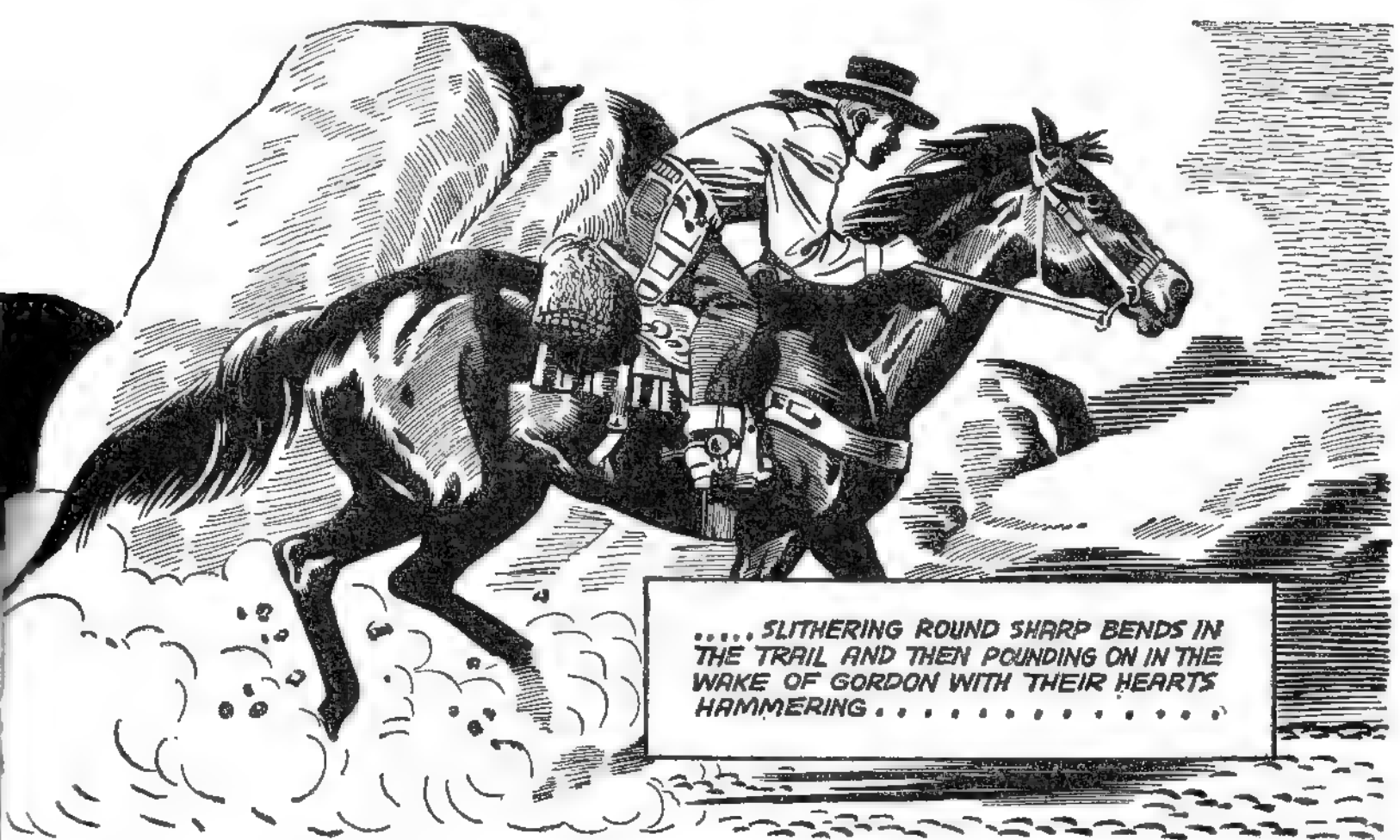
Pete?

T., D. and H. jumped as if they'd been stung by a trio of bees working as a team. Instantly Dick's right hand dropped to the butt of his six-gun but halted, the fingers curled for the grip, before it got there.

"Put y'r mitts up, kid," snarled Pete Skeffington. "You look a mite young, all three of you, for rustlers, but I guess Billy the Kid ain't 'xactly a greybeard. Hold on, Red," he roared to his companion. "We're not altering direction by one durned yard, savvy? Get back to the herd, Mister, and tell Charlie to take my place at point 'til I kin fix these kids. Injuns, my durned foot—for one thing they ain't likely to be as far east as this from San Carlos, and, for another, I guess Fleet Deer and Fellows ain't likely to let a bunch of braves go rampaging all over Arizona without tellin' me they were doin' it."

"O.K." The man addressed as Red looked relieved and it was obvious that whatever suspicion he might have had were now completely allayed by his trail boss's bold front. "Best treat them kids like they were men, Pete!" he added in a bull-like roar. "Talkin' of Billy the Kid, they do say he killed a guy before he took to wearing long pants." With that the speaker whirled his pony in a tight circle and was away, thrashing the creature with a lashing quirt.

The trail boss, the last person T., D. and H. wanted to be acting as point-man to the herd, fixed close-set grey eyes on his prisoners. "Ride in front of me, kids," he said



slowly, "and keep those mitts up in the air. If I so much as see only five hands instead of six I'll put a slug through all three of you—and I can kill at two hundred yards with this gun of mine. Savvy?"

Dick looked at the speaker. "Yes," he said quietly. "We understand, Skeffington. We also understand that you're running right into trouble if you keep on this trail. I wasn't lying just now. Those Apache Indians are there all right and y'r pals farther on will be disappointed when you and the herd don't show up after all."

The man's thick neck bulged and the close-set grey eyes were as hard as steel.

"Y've been readin' too many of those novels dudes like Tunstall are so durned fond of, kid," growled the trail boss. "You do as I tell you and mebbe y'll live long enough to see another sunrise; make one false move and I'll shoot what brains y've got all over the scenery. Get ridin', kids!"

There was nothing the boys could do but obey and, at the same time, offer up silent prayers that Gordon Gregory would get back from wherever it was he had gone in time to prevent the tragedy that came nearer and nearer with every hoofbeat of the restless beeves and cows. It was pretty obvious that this man, Pete Skeffington, knew nothing of Red Feather and could think of nothing but getting the two thousand beasts within striking distance of his cohorts at Panther Pass right on time. No doubt he figured that half a day's delay might ruin all the plans he and those others had made.

Riding with arms raised was wearying and downright painful. Let anyone try walking the best part of a mile with their hands lifted high over their heads, let alone ride ponies not exactly renowned for easy and gentle riding. It took longer than Tom, Dick or Harry thought possible to reach the drag, and they were thankful when a one-eyed herd cook emptied their holsters and then bound their ankles under the bellies of their ponies.

"Keep that eye of yours on the lot of them, Jake," rasped the trail boss. "Reckon we'll soon find a law officer who'll take care of 'em." He dragged a heavy silver watch from a pocket and looked at it. "What the heck——?" he began, shaking the timepiece viciously.

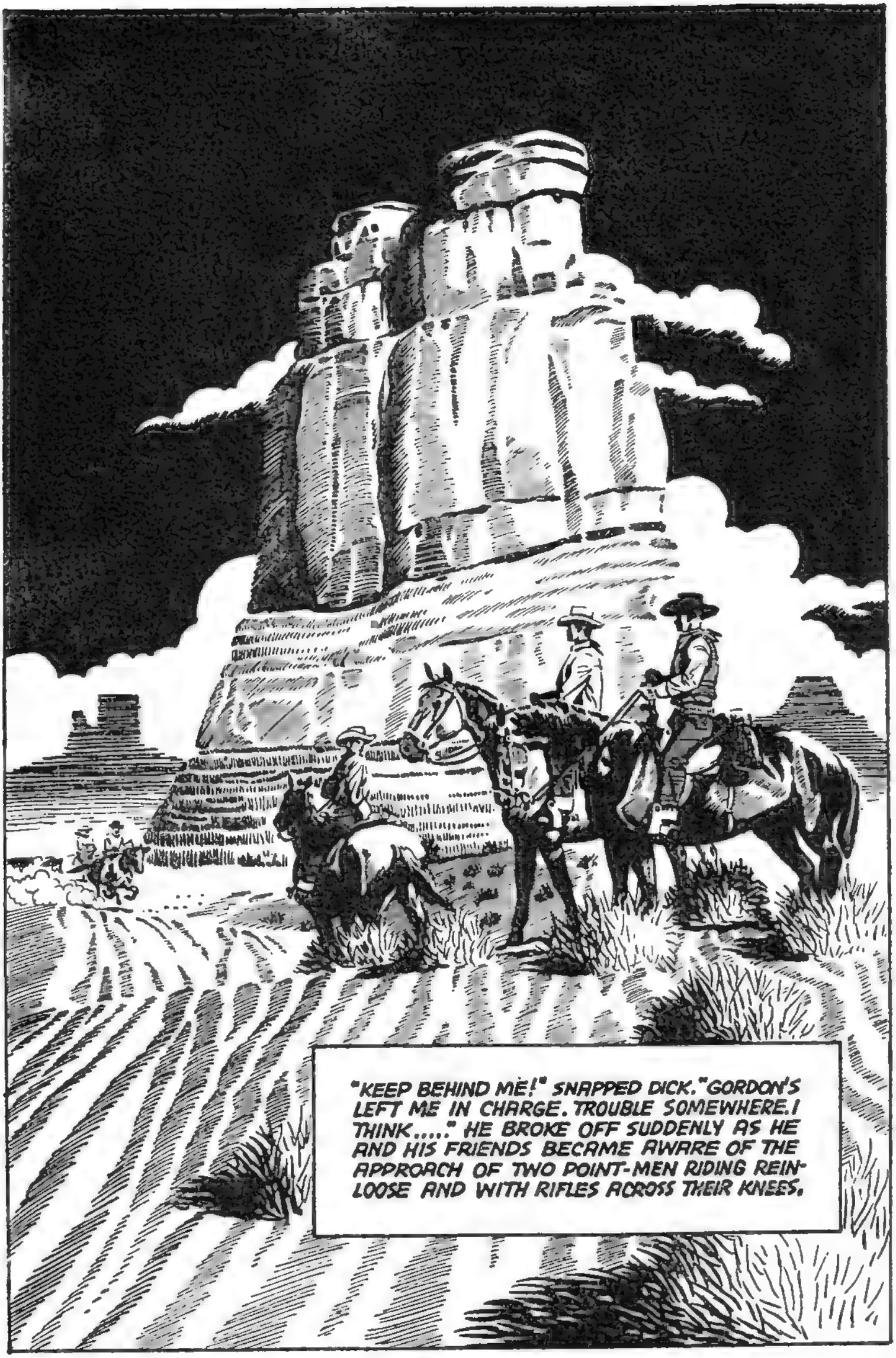
The cook guffawed. "Best give that thing to me, boss," he said. "You ain't goin' to beat the sun for tellin' the time." And his raucous laughter rang out again as Pete Skeffington dropped the watch back into his pocket with an air of disgust.

"You talk too much, Jake!" he growled. Then he raked his pony's flanks and rode off in a cloud of choking dust.

Tom, Dick and Harry never endured such a wearisome ride as that which followed in the wake of that great herd of beeves and cows being driven along the Chisum Trail for the San Carlos Reservation, to relieve the near famine among the Indians under Government protection and, as we have seen, exploited by unscrupulous men. It ended at last, however, as sundown saw the herd milled for the night and heard the high-pitched voices of the early night riders as they rode slowly round the restless animals with the ever-familiar songs on their lips.

Poor Tom Hall had been bursting to talk to Dick and Harry ever since the sun had started to set. Now, as the three prisoners found themselves guarded by a tobacco-chewing herder who, barring a twist of the head every now and again in their direction, paid little heed to them, Tom was able to unburden himself as he gulped down scalding-hot coffee and crammed pork and beans into his mouth.

"What happened?" he said hoarsely. "We passed the place where the Indians should have attacked hours ago. Do you think Gordon——?"


"KEEP BEHIND ME!" SNAPPED DICK. "GORDON'S LEFT ME IN CHARGE. TROUBLE SOMEWHERE. I THINK....." HE BROKE OFF SUDDENLY AS HE AND HIS FRIENDS BECAME AWARE OF THE APPROACH OF TWO POINT-MEN RIDING REIN-LOOSE AND WITH RIFLES ACROSS THEIR KNEES.

"Maybe!" grunted Dick. "But what's it matter? We're still alive, the herd hasn't been attacked and isn't likely to be before daylight. Stop getting all worked up, Tom, and trust Gordon. We've known him a long time, you know, and he's never actually let us down, has he?"

"N-no!" agreed the other, cheering up visibly. "No, he hasn't. Then you think——"

"I'm not thinking anything," interrupted Dick. "At least, I'm thinking that another dollop of pork and beans won't be unwelcome. Hey, Mister!" he called to the man, whose jaws moved with the same regular rhythm as the cows he herded. "How's about some more eats?"

The herder spat, let out a yell for the cook and the needs of the prisoners were supplied.

Half an hour later Tom, Dick and Harry, despite the desperate situation they were in, were fast asleep in their blankets as a velvet sky sparkled with stars above their heads.

. . . . . .

"Tom!"

Tom Hall came out of a dream like a cork from a bottle. "What the——?" he began.

"Wake up!" It was the unmistakable voice of Gordon Gregory. "Gosh! You'd sleep through a hurricane. Come on, Tom, on y'r feet." A hand reached out and grasped that of the boy; as the Colden fellow stood upright he realised that Dick Barrington and Harry Dalby, still rubbing sleep from their eyes, were with the returned Gordon. He also realised that the guard set over them wasn't there and that the whole camp was in a tumult.

"What's up?"

Gordon managed a grin.

"This!" he said crisply. "Pete Skeffington is no fool. He sent a man ahead of the herd yesterday afternoon and, when he didn't come back, he sent another guy to look for him. That second fellow came riding back five minutes ago with the first guy's body across his saddle, a body with an arrow sticking out of the back and without a scalp. That's why y'r guard was withdrawn and why we're getting out of here!—pronto! Come on!"

"No," cried Dick. "We can't go, Gordon, we really can't. Don't you see?—Red Feather will attack the moment it's light——" He hesitated and looked at the eastern sky. "Just about now!" he went on. "We've got to help these herders. It's a cinch that only the trail boss and, maybe, the cook are in with the Indian Agent. We must help the others, Gordon, we must!"

Crash! Crash!

The shots were the prelude to a positive fusillade as the postponed Indian attack came swiftly from the west. As with most such attacks it developed rapidly. Gordon Gregory bawled to the boys to get behind the chuck waggon and no sooner had they flung themselves prone on the ground than a shower of arrows made the pots and pans ring like bells.

"Don't draw their fire," warned Gordon.

It was too late. Excited and still not fully awake, Tom Hall let fly a shot at a brave on a piebald pony. The Indian swayed sideways in the saddle and vanished from

sight, but a split second later he fired from under the belly of his pony with a repeating rifle, obtained from goodness knows where. The shot missed Tom, but only because Gordon had dragged his friend backwards by the scruff of his neck.

Now shots and arrows whistled by the four boys and they wriggled under the waggon, to return the fire through the wheels.

"Charlie!" roared a hoarse voice. "They're too durned many for us. I'm getting out."

The reply didn't come for a moment or two. When it did, the answering voice was scornful and filled with hate. "O.K., Skeffington," it said. "Get out if you can, but I'll tell you this, if we both live through all this business you'd better ride fast and keep on ridin'. 'Cos why? 'Cos I'll get you if it's the last durned thing I do. I told——" The next few words were lost in a burst of gunfire. "John Chisum wouldn't believe me, Skeffington," came the voice of the man, Charlie, again, "but I've been right all along the line."

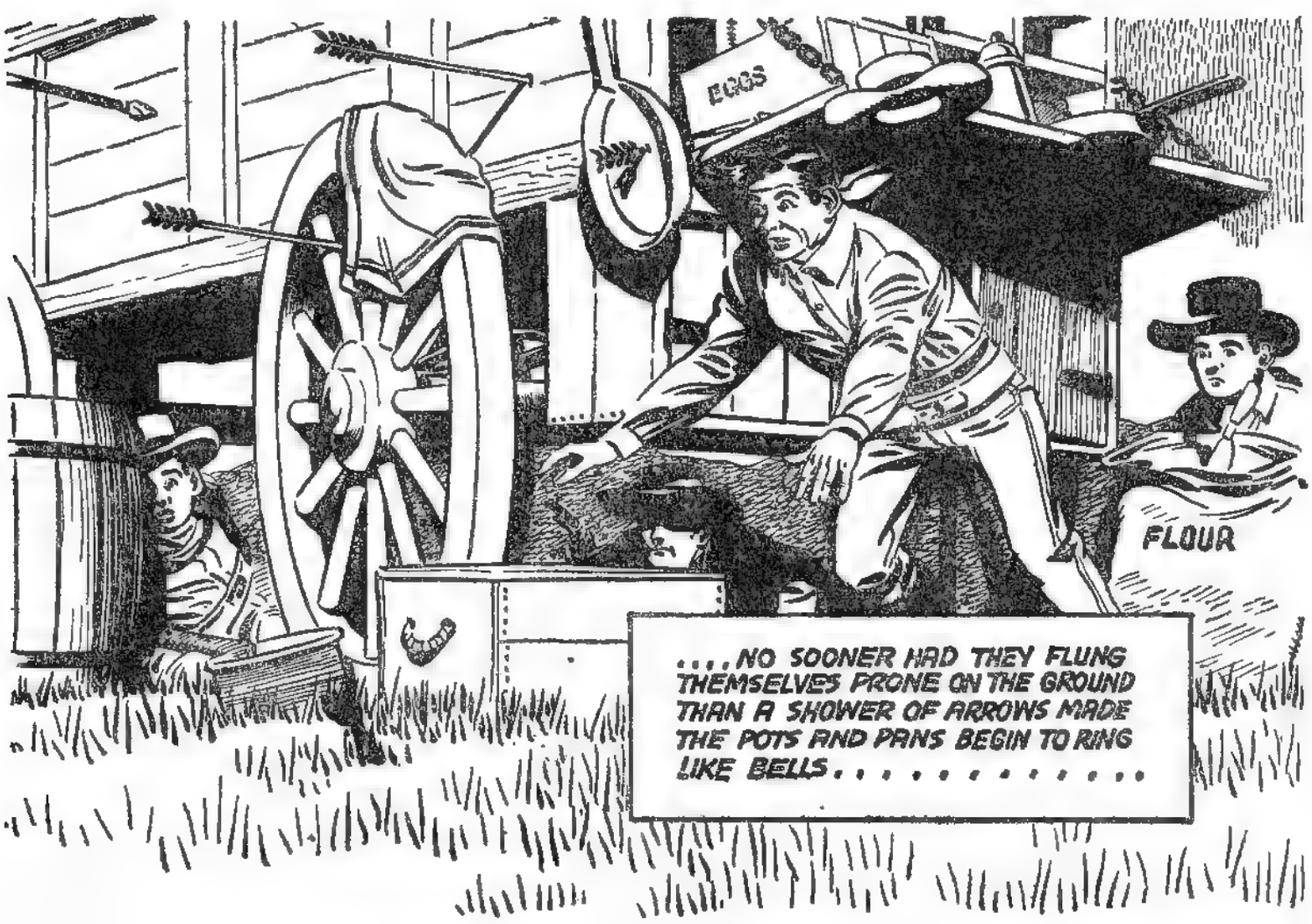
"Don't be a fool," screamed the trail boss. "Do you think I'd stage an Indian raid?"

"No! I don't," went on that hate-filled voice, "but you treated them kids as if they were hoodlums from Lincoln County. Maybe you figgered they'd spoil something else you had all fixed up; well, it's too late, Skeffington, you won't get away and nor will I. I reckon——!"

Crash! Crash!

Two more shots rang out, a brief silence and then the Apaches were everywhere. Yelling like devils, they drove the white men back into a compact group, taking what advantage they could from the now riddled chuck waggon.

"Dick!" Gordon's fingers were gripping his friend's arm. "This is the end. Join


EGGS
FLOUR
....NO SOONER HAD THEY FLUNG THEMSELVES PRONE ON THE GROUND THAN A SHOWER OF ARROWS MADE THE POTS AND PANS BEGIN TO RING LIKE BELLS.....

hands and . . ." The speaker stopped as if an arrow had found its target in his chest, but that was not the thing that stopped him. Suddenly, high above the yells of the Apache warriors, came more civilised but equally stringent yells, followed by such a crash of rifle and six-gun fire that it was almost continuous.

Harry Dalby had crawled into the open to sell his life dearly if, perchance, to die in the period he was in meant permanent death. At once a leaping brave, with a single scarlet feather in his greasy hair, towered over the boy. Harry caught a reeking whiff of the bear grease with which the savage's skin was covered and then twisted his body sideways as a gleaming tomahawk descended.

Crash!

He heard a yell stifled at birth and then Gordon's strong hands were about his shoulders dragging him back.

"Lie still!" hissed the leader of that band of adventurers in the Wild West. "It's Chisum and his men; they got here in time after all. Lie *still*——" repeated that voice. "We've done enough—more than enough."

So Tom, Dick and Harry remained passive for the five or ten minutes that the battle lasted after the death of the renegade Red Feather. All about them came the crash of guns, the hoarse cries of cowhands wallowing in this unaccustomed fight, and the wild, untutored yells of the Apache braves who had been robbed of their terrible victory as John Chisum, with all the men he had been able to gather round him from the home ranch, came riding to the rescue of his herders and those two thousand beeves and cows bound for the San Carlos Reservation.

Never in all their lives were Tom, Dick and Harry to forget what followed the precipitous flight of the redmen. With Gordon to give them strength they managed to climb into their saddles and help with the rounding up of the terrified cattle. For two or three hours they rode, swaying in the saddle with helpless weariness, and then, with that startling suddenness that they were finding part and parcel of life in the Wild and Woolly West, the business was done.

It was like coming out of a nightmare to find the sun streaming through one's window.

There was Gordon Gregory riding towards the three weary, dust-caked young cowhands.

"O.K., fellows," he said. "You'll do. Here comes John Chisum to say what I couldn't say if I lived another hundred or so years. Reckon he'll be busy for a bit—too busy to spare much time for us—but I guess we'll get a chance to talk to him properly later." The speaker paused as the great cattleman, so far no more than a name to Tom, Dick and Harry, rode up on a jet-black stallion. "Howdy, Mr. Chisum!" he greeted.

A hand came out to grip, in turn, those of the three Colden fellows.

"Thanks, boys!" growled a deep but musical voice. "I've seen a lot on the trail, but I've never seen anything to equal what you did. Gordon told me, when he contacted me yesterday, that you'd keep the pot simmering, but I reckon I didn't know the half of it. I'll be seeing you—I hope!" With that the cattleman raised a gloved hand, tugged at the reins and then cantered off into the blinding glare of the noonday sun.

Dick was the first to speak.

"So that's where you went, eh?" he said.

"Sure!" drawled Gordon. "Where else?"

That night the four camped peacefully, the while John Chisum and his men went on to Panther Pass to round up the rustlers, and they took a prisoner with them—Pete Skeffington. Seated around the campfire, however, T., D. and H. forgot fighting for a while as they listened to Gordon's endless stories and yarns.

Strange but TRUE

THE SHEEP-STEALER

Justice was often extremely rough in the days of the "Old" West, but one crusty old Justice of the Peace went a little too far at Bee Cave, Texas. Hating sheep-stealers, he once had a cow-puncher before him on a sheep-stealing charge.

"O.K., Mister," said the cowhand. "I stole the critter, how much have I got to pay?"

"Pay?" roared the J.P. "Y'll hang, feller, and mighty high at that. What's more, I'll make a durned example of you by hangin' you on the Fourth of July. Take him away!" he added, red of face and scowling.

"But you can't do that," protested the man's lawyer. "You ain't got authority to hang a man."

"Is that so?" roared the enraged Justice of the Peace, as he banged the desk in front of him with the gun he used for a gavel. "I'll show you how much authority this court's got. Any man who'd defend any ornery cuss on a sheep-stealin' charge is bound to be mixed up with sheep himself. That means he ain't fit to live in Texas. I sentence you to swing on the Fourth as that no-good's accomplice. Off with you to the cells!"

Things began to look serious and arrangements were actually being made to hang both the cow-puncher and his lawyer when higher authorities stepped in and stopped such a terrible miscarriage of justice. The hanging was cancelled and the J.P. was well and truly told off.

"Huh!" He spat when they told him the news. "Them goldurned lawyers alus keep messin' things up. They're nothing but a pack o' word-doodlin' crooks. I ain't serving Bee Cave no more and I ain't stayin' here either." And off he went from Bee Cave and, to this day, that community have never elected another Justice of the Peace because the citizens still feel insulted over the decision of the Supreme Court of the United States of America.

Yes, it's strange that justice can be so rough and ready, but it's true!

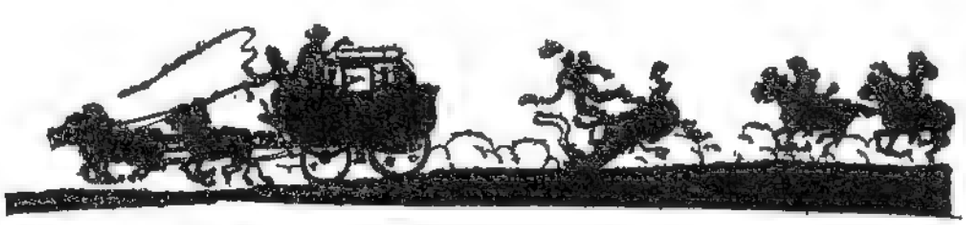
THE PORTABLE GAMBLING SALOON

In the days of the "Old" Wild West men gambled hard, and one man named Manuel Blasos—known as Old Blazes—toured the State of New Mexico in 1883 with a gambling saloon on wheels. Brightly painted, like a circus bandwagon, this contraption was drawn by six horses with their heads adorned with massive plumes. Three windows were cut in each side of this travelling saloon and, wherever it stopped, people were able to play roulette, faro and dice games.

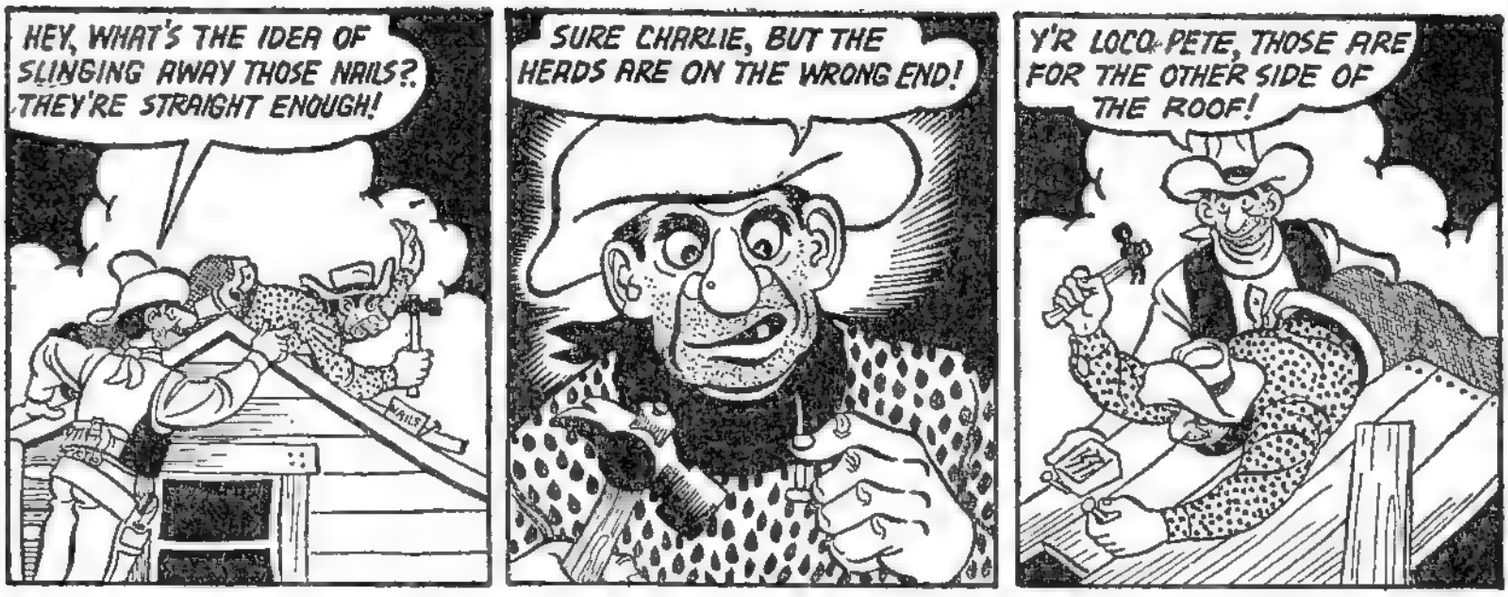
Old Blazes made a fortune out of his carriage before he vanished out of sight and was never heard of again.

PONY VERSUS EXPRESS

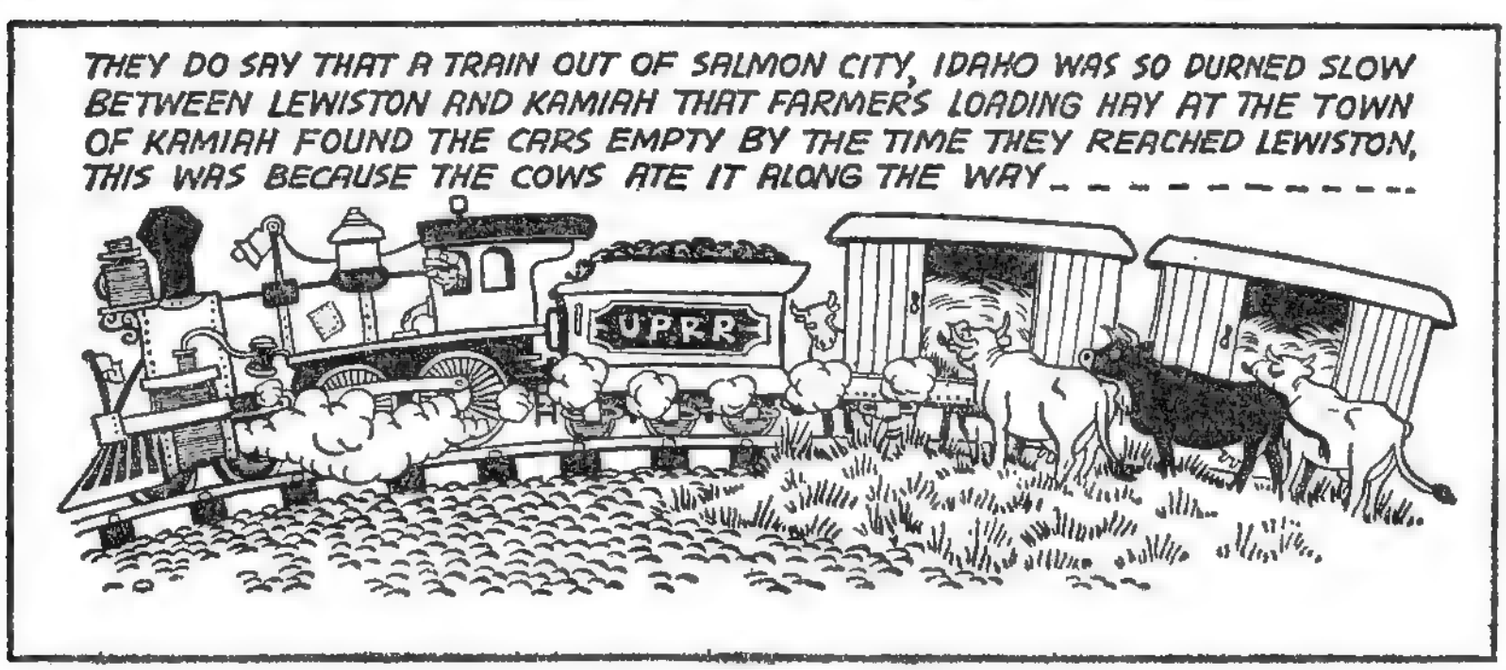
In the days when the railways were ruining those who ran Pony Expresses a rider named Haslam raced against the Pacific Express of the Central Pacific Railroad from Reno to Virginia City. Sometimes he covered the twenty-three miles in one hour flat, thus beating the express by some minutes.



COMICS
WELL IF YOU CAN'T SHELTER ME HOW FAR IS IT TO THE NEXT HOUSE?
DON'T KNOW, STRANGER. I AINT EVER BIN THAT FAR!
WHERE YOU TAKIN' THAT HAY KID?
TO BED, POP, I'M GOING TO FEED THAT NIGHTMARE OF MINE!
IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO FOR YOU JIM, 'COS I GUESS Y'R DYING RIGHT NOW!
SURE, BILL YOU KIN MOVE ME INTO THE LIVING-ROOM!


HEY, WHAT'S THE IDEA OF SLINGING AWAY THOSE NAILS?. THEY'RE STRAIGHT ENOUGH!
SURE CHARLIE, BUT THE HEADS ARE ON THE WRONG END!
Y'R LOCO PETE, THOSE ARE FOR THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROOF!

I GOT IT!. I'LL SHINE MY LANTERN UP TO THAT WINDOW AN' YOU CRAWL UP THE BEAM AN' OPEN IT!
NOPE! I KNOW YOU. I'D GET HALFWAY UP AN' YOU'D TURN THE LIGHT OFF!
NOPE! SLIM AINT SKEERED O' WORK, HE'LL LIE DOWN BESIDE THE BIGGEST KIND O' JOB AND GO CLEAN OFF TO SLEEP!
MOONSHINE
MOONSHINE


THEY DO SAY THAT A TRAIN OUT OF SALMON CITY, IDAHO WAS SO DURNED SLOW BETWEEN LEWISTON AND KAMIAH THAT FARMERS LOADING HAY AT THE TOWN OF KAMIAH FOUND THE CARS EMPTY BY THE TIME THEY REACHED LEWISTON, THIS WAS BECAUSE THE COWS ATE IT ALONG THE WAY. . . . . .
UPRR

IT ACTUALLY HAPPENED!

GOLD IS WHERE YOU FIND IT

There is a story concerning the discovery of a very rich mine in Colorado. It all started when a fellow had an argument with someone who drew a tenth of a second faster than he did. So it happened that the next day a procession wended its way up to the graveyard above the little mining town and, at the graveside, the preacher began his simple service.

Suddenly a gravedigger gave a little bleat and leapt into the grave, where he began scrabbling at the earth.

"Heck!" he roared. "Don't know how I missed it."

"What the heck——?" began someone.

"Gold!" shouted back the gravedigger.

In a moment the corpse, the preacher and the reason why they were there were forgotten by the mourners in the wild scramble to stake claims. Then, in the midst of the excitement, the preacher was heard to shout:

"Amen! Hey, boys, stake me out a slice of that!"

THE IRON WOMAN

Incredible things happened in the pioneer days of the West, but none so amazing as the adventures of Tabitha Brown who, at the age of sixty-six, gave up school-teaching and, with Uncle John Brown, an old sea-captain of seventy-seven, set out along the famed Oregon trail.

"The Iron Woman," as folk soon got to calling Tabitha, just grinned at her son Orrie when he came to say good-bye and said: "It ain't good-bye, son. Me and Uncle John reckon we'll travel along with you all."

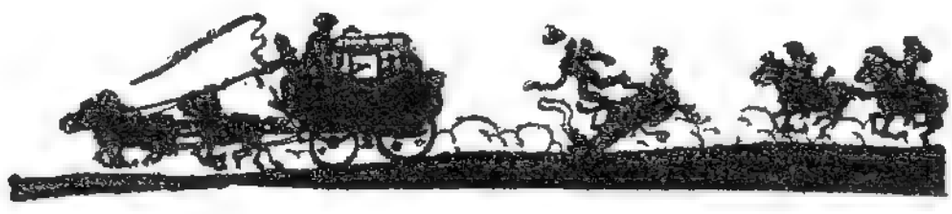
Buying a wagon and hiring a man to drive the oxen, off they went to prove that the West wasn't only a "young man's country." Uncle John rode his horse fourteen hundred miles with the best of them and Tabitha's wagon was the envy of the whole wagon train. Why, durn it, there was even a carpet in it, and her comfortable rocking-chair.

In camp at night she'd sit there, knitting, and folks would gather round if they were lonely, tired or, as some of them were, afraid of the wild, rugged, Indian-infested country.

When taking a short-cut, like the people of another wagon train, they met with disaster. Tabitha's wagon and her favourite rocking-chair were lost on the Rogue River and "the Iron Woman" had to struggle on astride a sturdy horse. Travelling with her daughter and her family,Tabitha finally divided the last of the bacon, keeping three slices for herself and Uncle John, and went on ahead to try to catch up with three wagons far in the lead. Unarmed, near starving, lashed with rain and blinded by snow, they struggled on.

Uncle John nearly collapsed, but "the Iron Woman" rode close to him and held him in the saddle. That night they dismounted, rigged up a little tent with some canvas under Tabitha's saddle and, with wolves howling nearby, waited for death. Instead, however, another party of immigrants found them and after more terrible struggles they reached their goal.

That wasn't all: Tabitha Brown opened another school which, in the end, became the Pacific University.



Bob Allen

Frontier Marshal

MARSHAL BOB ALLEN IS FAST ENOUGH WITH HIS BLAZING SIX-GUNS TO RULE A HARD AND VIOLENT FRONTIER TOWN... THOUGH HE PREFERS COLD NERVE TO HOT LEAD IN SETTLING DISPUTES! BUT THERE COMES A TIME IN THE PRECARIOUS LIFE OF EVERY LAWMAN WHEN LIFE HANGS ON THE FLIP OF A GUN-HAMMER! SUCH A TIME CAME TO BOB ALLEN WHEN HIS ENEMIES IMPORTED A KILLER... "THE FASTEST GUN IN THE WEST!"

CADE HOLT HAS TURNED HIS LONGHORN BANK INTO A TRAP FOR THE HELPLESS AND UNWARY!

YUH CAN'T TAKE OUR HOME, MR. HOLT! I HAD THE MORTGAGE MONEY BUT I WAS HELD UP AND ROBBED ON THE WAY TO PAY YOU OFF!

A LIKELY STORY, BURSON! EITHER HAND OVER $500 OR START PACKING! TUG, EARN YOUR PAY!

YUH HEARD WHAT CADE HOLT SAID, COW-NURSE! PAY UP OR CLEAR OUT!

WE...WE'LL LEAVE! WE STRUGGLED AND SAVED AND SOLD STOCK TO RAISE THE MONEY... AND NOW WE HAVE NOTHING!

I WOULDN'T PUT A DIRTY HAND ON THOSE NICE FOLKS IF I WERE YOU, TUG! I WOULDN'T LIKE IT!

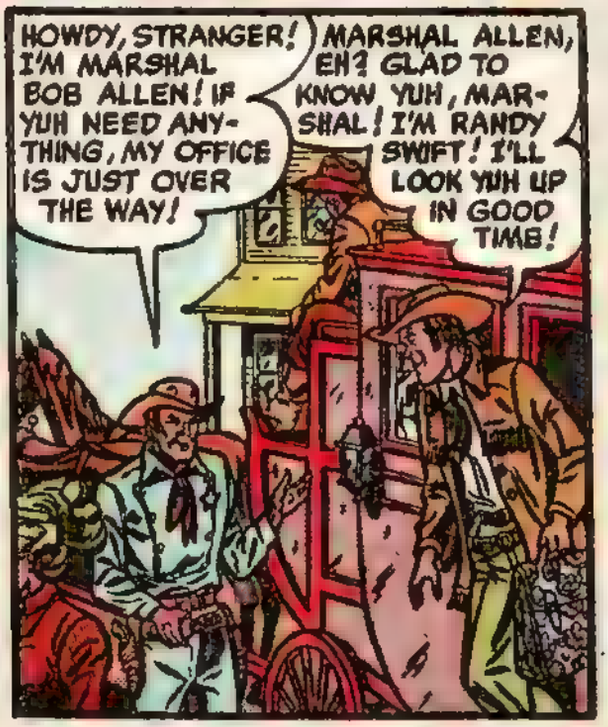
WHA...? MARSHAL ALLEN!

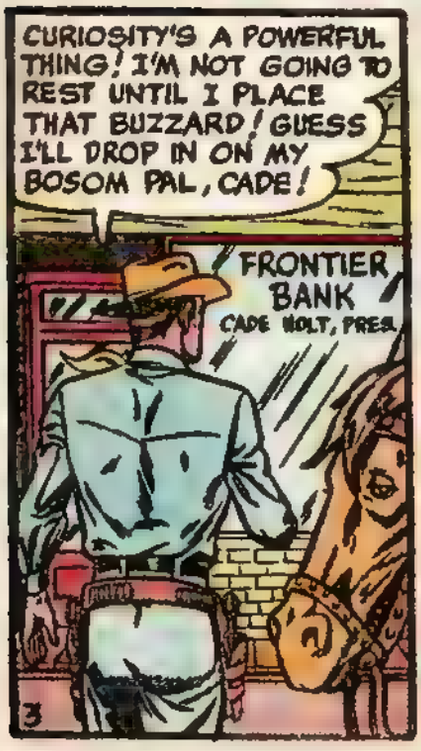
YOU KEEP OUT OF MY BUSINESS, MARSHAL! IF THESE PEOPLE CHOOSE TO GIVE ME LIES INSTEAD OF MY MONEY, I'M WITHIN MY RIGHTS!
OH, WAS THE MONEY ALL YOU WANTED, CADE?
HERE IT IS! I TOOK IT OFF THAT GUN-SLICK YOU SENT OUT TO ROB MR. BURSON ON THE TRAIL TO TOWN! I'LL TAKE THAT MORTGAGE!
HEAR THAT, MOTHER? THE MARSHAL SAVED OUR RANCH!
BLAST YOU, MARSHAL, YOU CAN'T PROVE THOSE LIBELS!
NOPE, CADE, I CAN'T!
AND THAT'S THE ONLY REASON YOU'RE STILL IN BUSINESS! BUT ONE OF THESE DAYS DECENT FOLKS WILL GET THEIR BREAK!
I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF THIS YAMMER-YAMMER!
I'M GONNA KILL YOU, YUH LOUD-MOUTH! THIS COUNTY AIN'T BIG ENOUGH FER BOTH OF US!
I AGREE WITH THAT LAST, TUG, AND DISAGREE WITH THE FIRST!
SO LONG, WISE G... ARGHHH!
FAST... BUT NOT QUITE FAST ENOUGH!
HE'S KILLED SEVEN FAST GUNMEN! BUT YOU OUT-DREW HIM! YOU KILLED HIM!
HE'S ONLY CREASED, CADE! PATCH HIM UP AND TELL HIM TO GET OUT OF TOWN! NEXT TIME WE MEET I WON'T GIVE HIM ANY BREAKS!
2

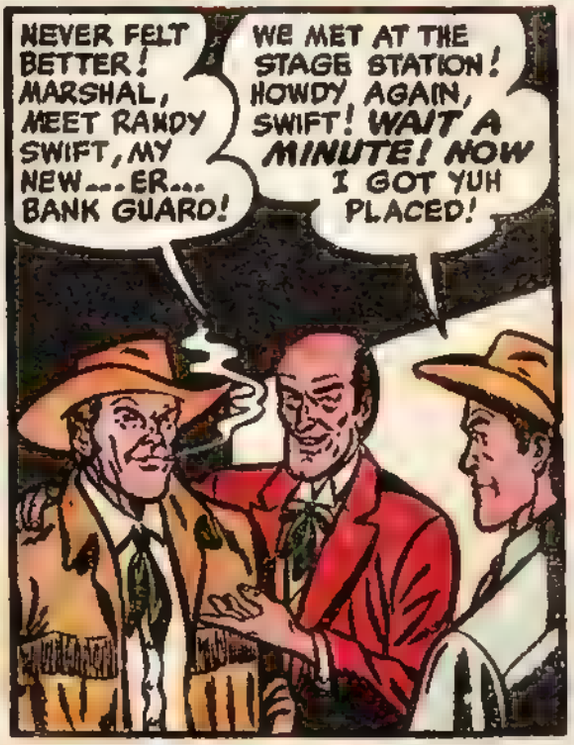
THERE ARE FASTER MEN THAN YOU, MARSHAL! YOU'LL GET YOURS ONE OF THESE DAYS! DON'T THINK YOU WON'T!
COULD BE, CADE! I'M ONLY SORRY YOU DON'T THINK YOU'RE ONE OF THEM!

I TRY MY BEST TO DODGE GUN-SLINGING... BUT IN YOUR CASE, CADE, I'D BE HAPPY TO MAKE AN EXCEPTION!
YOU'RE GOING TO FACE SOME GUN-SLINGING YOU CAN'T DODGE! I'LL SEE TO THAT!

A FEW WEEKS LATER, AS USUAL, MARSHAL ALLEN MET THE DAILY STAGE TO LOOK OVER THE VISITORS!


HOWDY, STRANGER! I'M MARSHAL BOB ALLEN! IF YUH NEED ANYTHING, MY OFFICE IS JUST OVER THE WAY!
MARSHAL ALLEN, EH? GLAD TO KNOW YUH, MARSHAL! I'M RANDY SWIFT! I'LL LOOK YUH UP IN GOOD TIME!


CURIOSITY'S A POWERFUL THING! I'M NOT GOING TO REST UNTIL I PLACE THAT BUZZARD! GUESS I'LL DROP IN ON MY BOSOM PAL, CADE!
FRONTIER BANK
CADE HOLT, PRES.
3


NEVER FELT BETTER! MARSHAL, MEET RANDY SWIFT, MY NEW... ER... BANK GUARD!
WE MET AT THE STAGE STATION! HOWDY, AGAIN, SWIFT! WAIT A MINUTE! NOW I GOT YUH PLACED!

YOU'RE THE GUN-HAND THEY HIRED TO CLEAN UP BOOM CITY AND POISONVILLE LAST YEAR! NOW I REMEMBER!
YOU HIT IT, MARSHAL! RANDY'S THE MAN THEY TAG "THE FASTEST GUN IN THE WEST!" HE COMES HIGH, BUT HE'S WORTH IT!
SHOW HIM THE FANCY SIX-GUNS YUH WON BY OUT-SHOOTING BAT MASTERSON AND WYATT EARP AT DODGE CITY, RANDY!
SHORE, CADE! CAN YUH READ WHAT THEY ENGRAVED? IT SAYS I'M THE FASTEST GUN-THROWER IN THE COUNTRY--- AND BAT SIGNED IT!
THAT'S A BIG REPUTATION FER A MAN TO LUG AROUND! WELL, I'M GLAD YOU'RE NOT THE BRAWLING TYPE, SWIFT!
NO, SIR! WHEN I'M HIRED TO DO A JOB, I DO IT, I DO IT NEAT AND QUIET AND DRIFT ALONG! I'M NO TROUBLE-HUNTER... JUST A BUSINESS MAN!
I HEAR TELL YOU AIN'T EXACTLY MUD-SLOW YOURSELF, MARSHAL! HOW ABOUT A LITTLE CONTEST, JEST FER FUN?
WHY, I FEEL A MITE FOOLISH GOIN' AGIN' A PROFESSIONAL LIKE YOU, BUT I'M AGREEABLE! TOSS A DOLLAR, CADE!
FRONT BANK
READY, GENTS? I'LL SPIN IT AND YOU HIT IT... IF YOU CAN!
GO AHEAD, CADE... BUT THE IDEA OF YOU THROWIN' AWAY A DOLLAR SORT OF HAS ME IN A TWITTER!
PING!
DRAW!
YOU'RE FAST, MARSHAL, BUT I'M JUST THAT EDGE FASTER!
YEP! CONGRATULATIONS, SWIFT! I'LL SEE YUH AROUND, GENTS! I'VE GOT TO GET BACK TO MY MARSHALIN'!
4

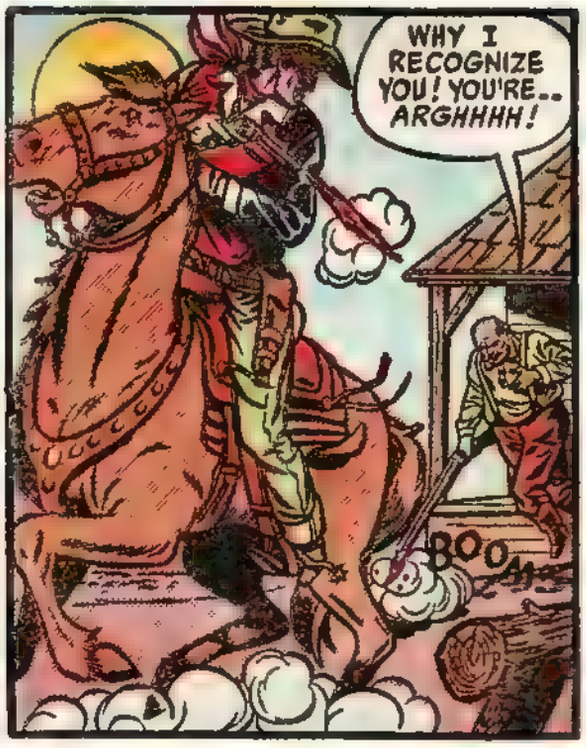
THAT EVENING...
MARSHAL ALLEN, YOU'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF TOWN! CADE'S BRAGGING ALL OVER TOWN HOW HE IMPORTED THAT GUN-HAWK TO KILL YOU!
THANKS, GENTS, BUT YOU KNOW THIS TOWN'D GO TO POT IF I LEFT IT ALONE!
ARE YOU LOCOED? SWIFT IS THE FASTEST GUN IN THE WEST! WHEN HE'S READY, HE'LL CROWD YOU AND KILL YOU!
I RECKON THAT'S THE GENERAL IDEA! BUT DYIN'S A THING WE GOT TO FACE, SOONER OR LATER! A MAN CAN TAKE IT GRACE-FUL OR AWKWARD!
THE NEXT MORNING...
'MORNING, MARSHAL! DID YUH SLEEP WELL LAST NIGHT?
MORNING, CADE, SWIFT! I SHORE DID! HATE TO DISAPPOINT YUH, BUT A BABY NEVER SNORED STEADIER!
THAT CADE HOLT'S SURE GOT A WEASLY DISPO-SITION! HE AIMS TO DRAG THIS THING OUT SO'S HE CAN WATCH ME SQUIRM AND WORRY!
HOWDY, SWIFT! LIGHT AND SMOKE! MAKIN'S?
DON'T MIND IF I DO, MARSHAL! NICE LITTLE OFFICE YUH GOT HERE! REMINDS ME OF MINE WHEN I WAS IN BOOM CITY!
MARSHAL, I RECKON YOU KNOW WHAT THE SCORE IS ON THIS DEAL!
RECKON I DO, SWIFT! IT AIN'T EXACTLY OBSCURE, AS THE BOOKS SAY IT!
I JEST WANTED TO SAY IT'S NOTHIN' PERSONAL! I LIKE YUH, MARSHAL! YUH'D DO TO RIDE WITH, BUT I NEVER BACK DOWN ON A JOB!
THANKS, SWIFT! I SORTA ADMIRE A MAN WITH PRINCIPALS, MYSELF!
CADE SAYS TO TELL YUH IT WON'T DO NO GOOD TO GUN HIM OUT FIRST! HE PAID ME IN ADVANCE, SO I'D HAVE TO GO THROUGH WITH IT ANY HOW!
I MUST BE GETTIN' OLD, SWIFT! I NEVER EVEN THOUGHT O' THAT! BUT I'M OBLIGED FOR THE VISIT!

I DON'T KNOW WHEN IT'LL BE! CADE WANTS ME TO DRAG IT OUT SO'S YOU'LL SWEAT! I TOLD HIM HE WAS A FOOL TO THINK YOU'D SQUIRM!
WELL, WHEN HE GETS TIRED O' WAITIN', I RECKON I'LL BE AROUND, SWIFT! ADIOS!
WHAT TH....?
DURN, LOCOED IDJIT!
WHA..?
BURSON, YOU FOOL! IF YOU'D BUSHWACKED THAT FELLER LIKE YOU AIMED, I'D HAVE HAD TO SEE YOU HANGED!
BUT HE'S GOING TO KILL YOU WITHOUT A CHANCE, MARSHAL BOB... AND YOU SAVED OUR RANCH! I CAN'T LET HIM KILL YOU!
YOU GIT, NOW! GO ON HOME AND TAKE CARE OF THAT RANCH! LET ME HANDLE MY PROBLEMS BY MYSELF!
THANKS, MARSHAL! I GUESS IF YOU HADN'T BEEN FAST, I'D HAVE BEEN A MIGHTY UNPLEASANT CORPSE OUT THERE IN THE DUST!
STAR SALOON
I'D FEEL MUCH BETTER IF YOU HAD HALF A CHANCE! LET ME PUT THIS OFF A WEEK OR TWO AND YOU GO PRACTISE THAT DRAW SOME MORE!
THANKS, SWIFT, BUT IT WOULDN'T DO NO GOOD! I RECKON I'VE GOT ABOUT ALL THE SPEED RIGHT NOW I'M EVER GOING TO HAVE!
THAT MARSHAL'S EVEN A BIGGER FOOL THAN I FIGURED HIM! HE COULD HAVE LET BURSON BACKSHOOT YOU AND HE'D BE IN THE CLEAR!
NOW, JUST A MINUTE, CADE! DON'T YOU GO CALLIN' NAMES WHERE I CAN HEAR YUH!
BANK
1884
6

YUH HIRED ME FOR A KILLING AND I DON'T RENIG ON JOBS! BUT IF YOU SAY ONE WORD AGIN' MARSHAL ALLEN, I'LL DO ANOTHER JOB FOR FREE!
UG! T-TAKE YORE HANDS OFF ME...
JEST REMEMBER THAT! I TOOK YORE PAY... BUT MARSHAL BOB ALLEN'S TEN TIMES THE GENT YOU'D BE IF YOU WERE TWINS!
P-PUT THAT GUN AWAY, YOU F-FOOL! I CAN'T FIGURE YOU OUT!
IF YOU'RE SO FOND O' THAT POLECAT, WHY DON'T YUH LIGHT OUT?
BECAUSE I TOOK A JOB AND I NEVER BACK DOWN! BUT YOU WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND ANYTHING THAT CONCERNED BEIN' HONEST!
GET OUTA MY SIGHT! YOU MAKE ME SICK O' MY OWN HANDS! THIS IS THE LAST GUN-JOB I'LL EVER TAKE! I CAN'T STAND THE SNAKES I HAFTA DEAL WITH!
WHY, YOU...!
WAIT A MINUTE! I'VE CHANGED MY MIND ABOUT WAITING! IF YOU'RE SO UPSTANDING, DO THE JOB NOW! CALL THE MARSHAL OUT AND FINISH HIM!
IT'S YORE MONEY! I'M READY ANYTIME! STAND CLEAR... POLECAT!
OH, MARSHAL! BUCKLE ON YORE IRONS AND COME OUT! THE SIDEWINDER SAYS THIS IS IT!
COMIN', SWIFT!
TAKE YOUR TIME, MARSHAL! MAKE SURE THEY'RE LOOSE IN THE LEATHER! I'M WALKIN' SLOW!
KEEP WALKIN', SWIFT! I WOULDN'T HAVE LIVED THIS LONG IF I DIDN'T KEEP 'EM FREE AND LOOSE!
JOE'S GENERAL STORE

ONE THING, MARSHAL, WHEN THIS IS OVER I'M TAKIN' CARE OF CADE HOLT! THAT VARMINT AIN'T FIT TO GO ON SOILING GOOD EARTH!
THAT'LL BE A COMFORT, SWIFT! BUT DO IT LEGAL! WE STAY MIGHTY TIGHT TO THE LAW IN THIS TOWN!
TOBACCO
SADDL
THIS IS IT! DRAW!
OOOOO...! THE MARSHAL OUTDREW SWIFT! HE BEAT HIM FAIR!
ARGH!
THE DIRTY COYOTE! HE'S RUNNING OUT... LEAVING TOWN!
AND GOOD RIDDANCE! SAVES A MESSY CHORE LATER ON! YUH FEEL PURTY BUSTED UP, SWIFT?
SMITH
JEST BOTH ARMS, BOB! YUH OUT-DRAWED ME FAIR! I THOUGHT I WAS THE FASTEST GUN...!
SHUCKS, MEN... I GOT ENGRAVING LIKE THAT ON MY GUNS, TOO, BUT I FIGGER IF I DON'T TALK ABOUT IT, I DON'T HAVE TO PROVE IT SO OFTEN!
THEN..., WHEN WE DREW ON THAT DOLLAR, YOU PURPOSELY PULLED SLOW!
WHY, SHORE! DIDN'T SEEM TO BE MUCH SENSE IN GIVING OUT MY MEASURE BEFORE I HAD TO! I DIDN'T AIM FOR THIS TO BE A KILLIN'!
I RECKON THESE ARMS'LL NEVER DO TO PULL GUNS WITH AGAIN!
THAT'S WHAT I WANTED, SWIFT! YOU'RE TOO GOOD A MAN TO WASTE YOURSELF ON KILLING! REST UP AND WE'LL TALK ABOUT A JOB!

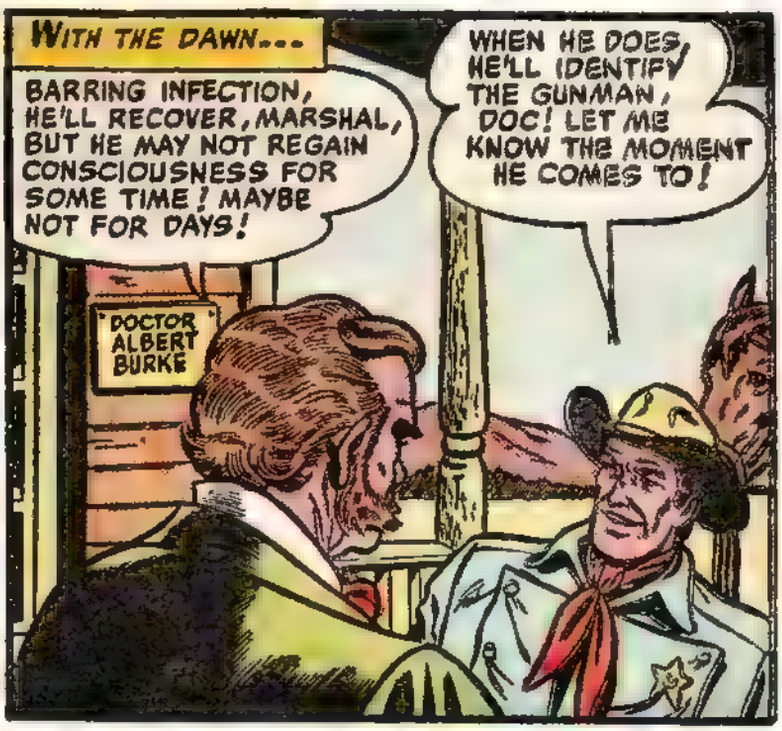
Bob Allen
Frontier Marshal
IN A COUNTRY WHERE EVERYBODY GAMBLED, THEY SAID MARSHAL BOB ALLEN WAS NO GAMBLER! NEITHER THE CARDS NOR THE ROULETTE WHEELS COULD LURE HIM FROM HIS DUTY! BUT WHEN THE CHIPS WERE DOWN, THE FRONTIER MARSHAL WAS READY TO GAMBLE HIS LIFE ON A... "GUN-SLINGER'S GRATITUDE!"
JAIL
BANKER SAM WESTLEY LIVES ONLY A FEW DOORS FROM HIS BANK!
SAM! WHAT IS IT? WHAT ARE YOU DOING UP AT THIS HOUR?
I JUST SAW A LIGHT FLICKERING IN THE BANK! SOMEBODY'S BROKEN IN!
DON'T GO DOWN THERE, SAM WESTLEY! GET MARSHAL ALLEN!
YOU RUN FOR THE MARSHAL, SARAH! I'M NOT LETTING ANY DIRTY BANDIT GET AWAY WITH THE TOWN'S MONEY!
HALT! STAND RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE OR I'LL SHOOT!
BANK
WHA-?

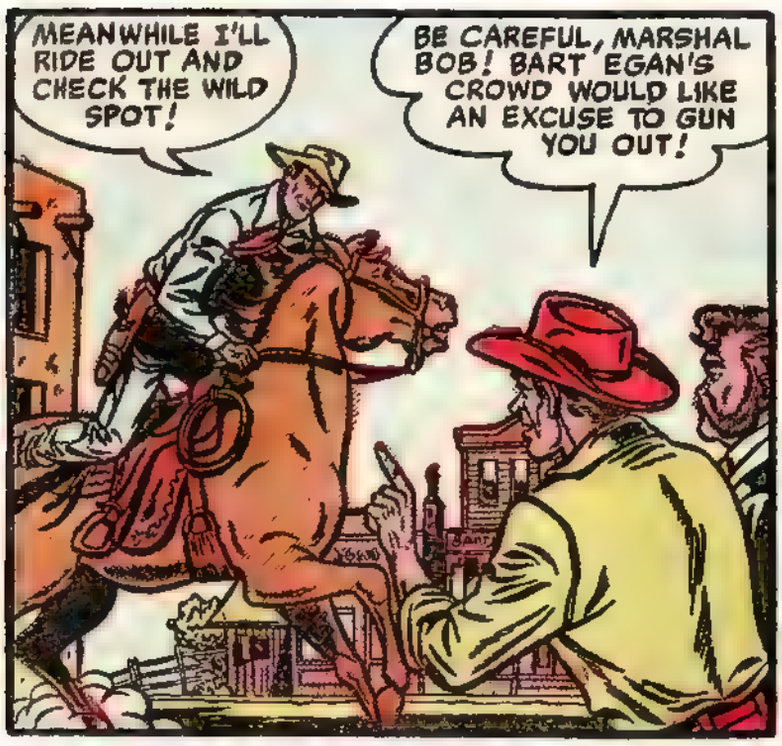

WHY I RECOGNIZE YOU! YOU'RE.. ARGHHHH!
BOOM

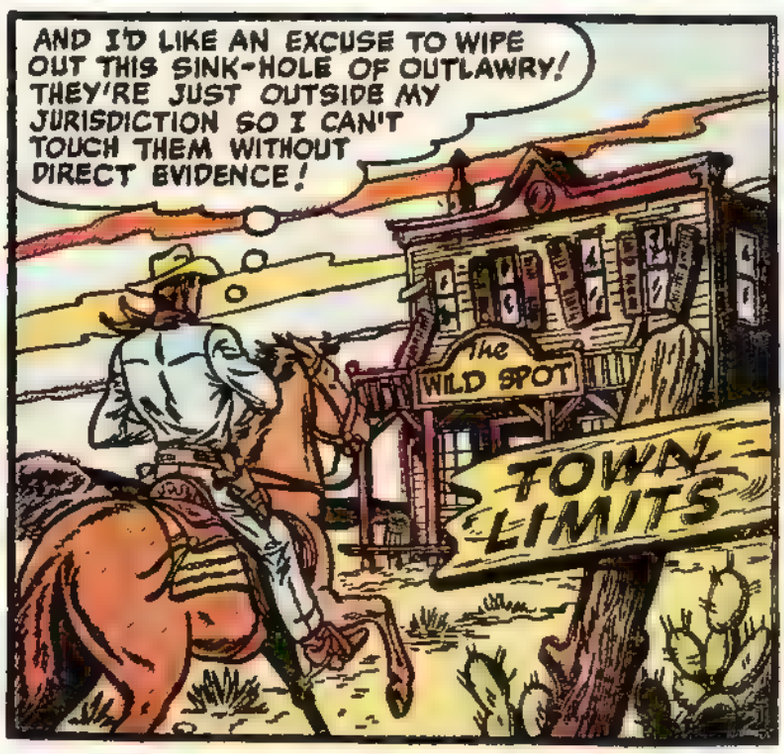
SAM! SAM!

DOCTOR! PLEASE HURRY!
HE'S HEADING STRAIGHT FOR THE WILD SPOT!
BANG! BANG!

I... RECOGNIZED... HIM! IT... WAS... AGHHHH!
HE'S UNCONSCIOUS AGAIN, MARSHAL! HELP ME CARRY HIM TO MY OFFICE!


WITH THE DAWN...
BARRING INFECTION, HE'LL RECOVER, MARSHAL, BUT HE MAY NOT REGAIN CONSCIOUSNESS FOR SOME TIME! MAYBE NOT FOR DAYS!
WHEN HE DOES, HE'LL IDENTIFY THE GUNMAN, DOC! LET ME KNOW THE MOMENT HE COMES TO!
DOCTOR ALBERT BURKE


MEANWHILE I'LL RIDE OUT AND CHECK THE WILD SPOT!
BE CAREFUL, MARSHAL BOB! BART EGAN'S CROWD WOULD LIKE AN EXCUSE TO GUN YOU OUT!


AND I'D LIKE AN EXCUSE TO WIPE OUT THIS SINK-HOLE OF OUTLAWRY! THEY'RE JUST OUTSIDE MY JURISDICTION SO I CAN'T TOUCH THEM WITHOUT DIRECT EVIDENCE!
the WILD SPOT
TOWN LIMITS

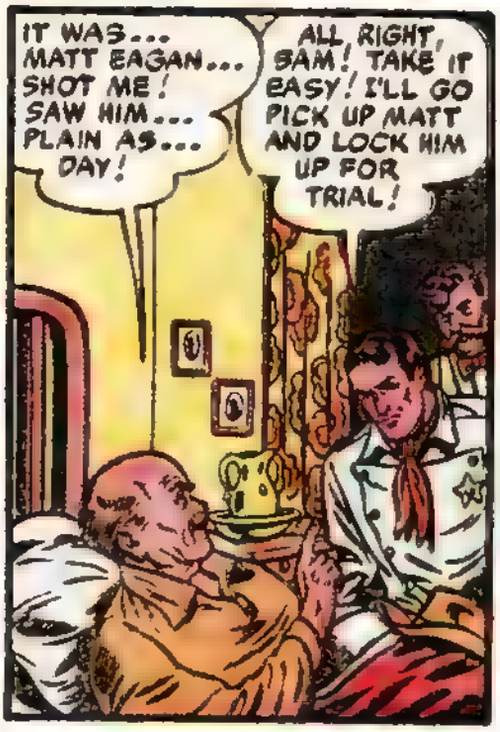
OKAY, BADGE-TOTER! YOU GOT NO BUSINESS HERE! IF YOU COME IN, LEAVE YOUR GUNS OUTSIDE! YOU KNOW YOU AIN'T WELCOME!
THIS IS JUST A VISIT, SON! I'LL LEAVE MY GUNS!
YOU'RE YOUNG BUD BERAN, AREN'T YOU? I HATED TO SEE YOU GET MIXED UP WITH BART EAGAN'S BUNCH! YOUR DAD WAS A FINE MAN!
SKIP THE SERMON! I PICK MY OWN FRIENDS... AND THEY DON'T INCLUDE ANY TIN-BADGE SNOOPERS!
HOWDY, GENTS! MORNIN' BART AND MATT! YOU CAN RELAX! THIS IS JUST A SOCIAL VISIT!
WE PREFER TO PICK OUR OWN SOCIETY, MARSHAL! THAT'S WHY WE OPERATE OUTSIDE YOUR LIMITS! WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?
HAD A LITTLE RUCKUS IN TOWN LAST NIGHT! FELLER ROBBED THE BANK AND SHOT OLD SAM WESTLEY! WE KINDA LIKE SAM AROUND TOWN!
I'M CRYIN' TEARS AS BIG AS WAGON WHEELS! WHAT IS THIS, AN INVITE TO HIS FUNERAL?
NO CREDIT
OH, THERE WON'T BE ANY FUNERAL! SAM'LL RECOVER, LUCKILY, AND WHEN HE DOES HE'LL TELL US WHO SHOT HIM! HE SAW THE BANDIT! JUST THOUGHT YOU'D LIKE TO KNOW THE NEWS!
WHY, THAT...!
STOP IT, YOU FOOL! SHOOTING AN UNARMED MARSHAL IN THE BACK WOULD BE SOMETHING NOT EVEN I COULD WASH OFF!
I TOLD YUH THE OLD FOOL RECOGNIZED ME! I GOTTA RIDE IN TONIGHT AND BLAST HIM! AGAIN SO HE CAN'T TALK!
MATT, EVEN IF YOU ARE MY BROTHER, I SAY YUH AIN'T GOT THE BRAINS OF A LOCOED PRAIRIE DOG SOMETIMES! GET SMART!

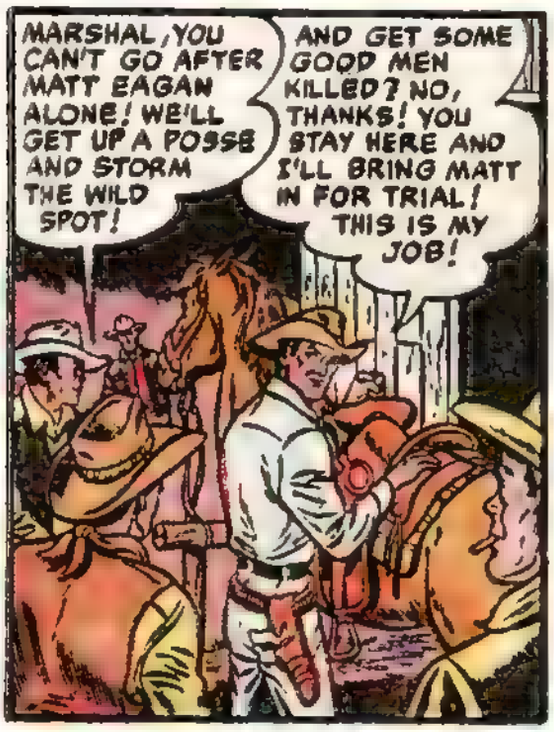
LET HIM TALK! WHAT CAN MARSHAL ALLEN DO? IF HE TRIES TO ARREST YOU HERE, OUTSIDE HIS TERRITORY, WE'LL TAKE CARE OF HIM!
YOU'RE RIGHT, BART! MAYBE THIS IS THE CHANCE WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR, TO GUN THAT BADGE-TOTING BUZZARDS OUT FOR KEEPS!
LATER THAT DAY, IN TOWN...
I'D GUESS SAM'LL BEGIN TO COME TO LATE TONIGHT, MARSHAL! IF YOU AIM TO NAB HIS ATTACKER, STICK AROUND HANDY!
I'LL NAB HIM, DOC! SEEMS TO ME WE GOT SOME KIND OF A LAW IN THIS TOWN AGAINST SHOOTING OUR BANKERS!
GENERAL STO
That NIGHT...
WHA...? SOUNDS LIKE A FULL-FLEDGED RIOT GOING ON!
GET HIM! STRING HIM UP! WE'LL SHOW THE DIRTY KILLER!
ALL RIGHT, FOLKS! WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
WE CAUGHT THIS DIRTY WILD SPOT RAT IN TOWN, MARSHAL! HE WAS PROBABLY SNEAKING BACK TO FINISH SAM OFF SO HE COULDN'T TALK!
IT ISN'T TRUE, MARSHAL! B-BUD CAME TO VISIT ME! W-WE'RE IN LOVE!
WELL, NOW, AS I REMEMBER, WE'VE GOT NO LAWS AGAINST YOUNG FOLKS FALLING IN LOVE!
HE'S FROM BART EAGAN'S WILD SPOT! WE CAUGHT HIM IN TOWN AND WE AIM TO STRING HIM UP!
SORRY, BILL, BUT WE HAVE LAWS AGAINST LYNCHING! HOW ABOUT IT, BUD, DO YOU HAVE AN EXCUSE FOR BEING HERE?
SKIP THE GAGS, MARSHAL! I'M CAUGHT IN TOWN! GO AHEAD AND HAVE ME STRUNG UP!
DON'T TRY TO BE A DEAD HERO, BUD! IF YOU CAME TO TOWN JUST TO SEE SALLY, I'M NOT THE ONE TO MAKE A FUSS ABOUT IT!

NOW STEP ASIDE, MARSHAL! YOU KNOW WHAT THE WILD BUNCH DID TO SAM! THEY'RE ALL THIEVES AND KILLERS AND DESERVE TO HANG!
I'LL AGREE, PETE---WHEN THEY'VE BEEN CONVICTED ON LEGAL EVIDENCE! I'LL HANG ANY ONE OF THEM YOU HELP ME CONVICT LEGALLY!

I TAKE IT THEY'VE NOTHING AGAINST YOU, BUD! TAKE YOUR GUNS AND CLEAR OUT WHILE THEY'RE STILL UNCERTAIN!
YOU... YOU'RE LETTING ME GO, MARSHAL? AFTER THE WAY I SHOT OFF MY MOUTH AT YOU? I WON'T FORGET THIS, ALLEN!

NOW LOOK HERE, MARSHAL! WE'VE HAD ENOUGH OF YOUR...!
MARSHAL, COME QUICK! SAM'S CONSCIOUS AND WANTS TO TELL YOU WHO ROBBED THE BANK AND SHOT HIM!


IT WAS... MATT EAGAN... SHOT ME! SAW HIM... PLAIN AS... DAY!
ALL RIGHT, SAM! TAKE IT EASY! I'LL GO PICK UP MATT AND LOCK HIM UP FOR TRIAL!


MARSHAL, YOU CAN'T GO AFTER MATT EAGAN ALONE! WE'LL GET UP A POSSE AND STORM THE WILD SPOT!
AND GET SOME GOOD MEN KILLED? NO, THANKS! YOU STAY HERE AND I'LL BRING MATT IN FOR TRIAL! THIS IS MY JOB!

TELL ME ONE THING, SALLY... IS BUD REALLY IN LOVE WITH YOU? HAS HE TALKED MARRIAGE?
OH, YES, MARSHAL! HE AIMS TO QUIT THE WILD BUNCH AND SETTLE DOWN TO A RANCH JOB! WE'RE IN LOVE! HE ISN'T REALLY BAD!
STABLE

THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME! GET A CELL READY FOR MATT, BOYS!
YUH DURN FOOL, MARSHAL! THEY WON'T LET YUH NEAR THE SPOT WITH YORE GUNS --- AND WITHOUT 'EM BART EAGAN'LL BLOW YUH APART!

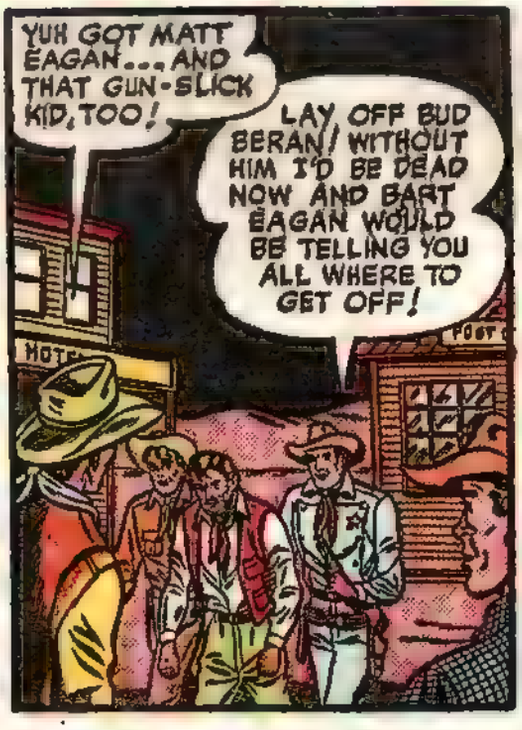
A FEW MINUTES LATER...
The WILD SPOT
INSIDE FOR A TALK, AMIGO! I'M HANGING MY GUNS ON THE SADDLEHORN, SO STOP FEVERING AROUND ABOUT IT!
OKAY, MARSHAL! AND WHERE DO YUH THINK YOU'RE GOING?
NOW LOOK, YOU! WE AIN'T TAKIN'...!
QUIET! AND LET THOSE GUNS ALONE! BART EAGAN WOULDN'T LIKE A KILLING HE COULDN'T WIGGLE OUT OF!
WELL, LOOK WHO'S HERE! COME TO DO A LITTLE GAMBLING, MARSHAL?
AS A MATTER OF FACT, I DID, BART! I'VE COME TO ARREST YOUR BROTHER, MATT, FOR BANK ROBBERY AND ATTEMPTED MURDER!
ARE YOU JOKING? YOU, WITHOUT A GUN, GONNA ARREST MY BROTHER?
THAT'S RIGHT, BART! SAM WOKE UP AND NAMED MATT AS THE GUN-MAN WHO SHOT HIM DOWN! I'LL SEE THAT HE GETS A FAIR TRIAL!
HAW-HAW-HAW! IF THAT AIN'T RICH, BOYS! OUR UNARMED MARSHAL AIMS TO TAKE MATT IN FOR TRIAL!
HA, HA, BART! THAT'S THE BEST JOKE SINCE OLD ONE-ARM MIKE TRIED TO TAKE OVER YOUR BUNCH!
TOO BAD, MARSHAL, BUT YOU'RE IN A FIX! THE BOYS DON'T LIKE YUH AND YOU'RE IN HERE WITHOUT ANY LEGAL RIGHT!
I SEE, BART! YOU MEAN I CAN BE KILLED AND YOU CAN ALWAYS CLAIM I TRIED TO FORCE MY WAY IN WHERE I HAD NO RIGHT?
YUH CALLED IT, SNOOPER! WE BEEN ITCHIN' FOR A CHANCE TO WIPE YOU OUT AND THIS IS IT! SHALL I PLUG HIM NOW, BART?
WHY NOT? HE COME TO ARREST YOU SO I RECKON YOU GOT A RIGHT TO FIRST SHOT! LET HIM HAVE IT!

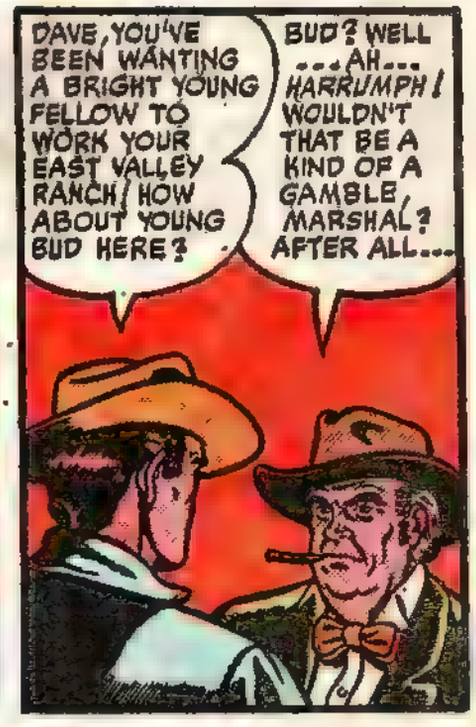
SAY YORE PRAYERS, BADGE-BUZZARD! THIS IS YORE FINISH...!
HOLD IT...!
WHA...? YOU GONE OFF YOUR ROCKER, BUD?
NO! I JUST GOT ONTO IT, MATT! FUNNY, I GUESS I BEEN KINDA BLIND LATELY, NOT TO RECOGNIZE POLECATS WHEN I CHUMMED WITH 'EM!
NEVER MIND THE FOOL KID! PLUG THE MARSHAL...!
MARSHAL! CATCH!
THANKS, BUD!
NO YOU DON'T, BUZZARD!
BANG!
YOU'RE UNDER ARREST, MATT... AS I SAID BEFORE!
YOU'LL NEVER... EEEOW!
POW!
POW!
GO ON, MARSHAL! GET OUT WHILE YUH CAN! I'LL STAND THEM OFF!
WE'RE LEAVING TOGETHER, BUD! SALLY'S WAITING FOR YOU IN TOWN!
BANG!
YOU AIN'T TAKIN' ME IN!
HEY...! LOOK OUT!

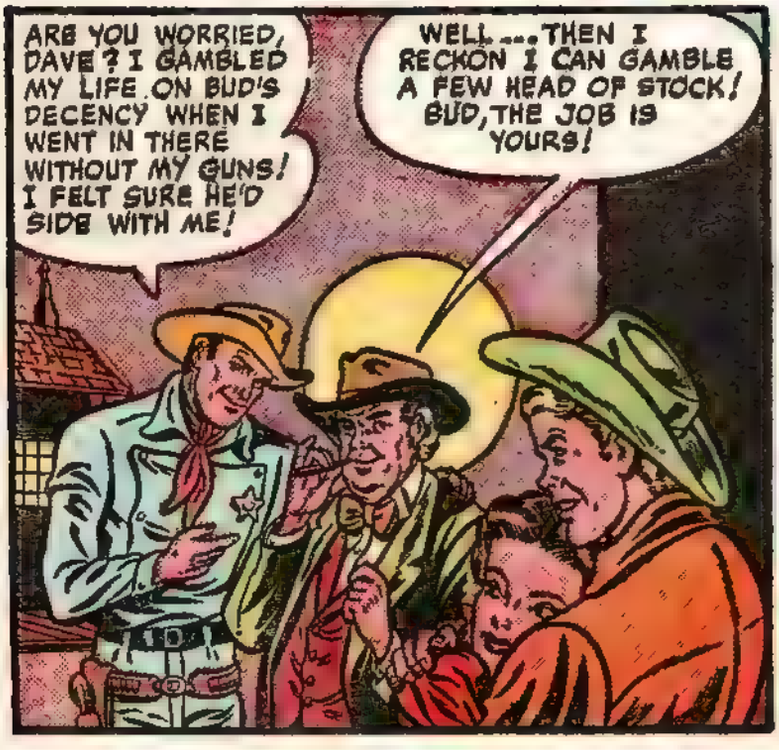
IT'S ALL RIGHT, BUD! I WAS HOPING FOR THIS EXCUSE!
GOT YOU, YUH TWO-FACED COYOTE!

LET'S MAKE THIS A CLEAN SWEEP, BUD... SO NO MORE YOUNG FELLOWS GET LED INTO WRONG PATHS!
CRASH!

YOU DID IT, MARSHAL! THAT'LL BE THE END OF BART EAGAN AND HIS BUNCH! WITH MATT EAGAN IN JAIL, HIS POWER IS GONE!
AND YOU'RE FREE TO START A NEW LIFE WITH SALLY, BUD!


YUH GOT MATT EAGAN... AND THAT GUN-SLICK KID, TOO!
LAY OFF BUD BERAN! WITHOUT HIM I'D BE DEAD NOW AND BART EAGAN WOULD BE TELLING YOU ALL WHERE TO GET OFF!


DAVE, YOU'VE BEEN WANTING A BRIGHT YOUNG FELLOW TO WORK YOUR EAST VALLEY RANCH! HOW ABOUT YOUNG BUD HERE?
BUD? WELL ...AH... HARRUMPH! WOULDN'T THAT BE A KIND OF A GAMBLE, MARSHAL? AFTER ALL...


ARE YOU WORRIED, DAVE? I GAMBLED MY LIFE ON BUD'S DECENCY WHEN I WENT IN THERE WITHOUT MY GUNS! I FELT SURE HE'D SIDE WITH ME!
WELL... THEN I RECKON I CAN GAMBLE A FEW HEAD OF STOCK! BUD, THE JOB IS YOURS!

MARSHAL, I'M GLAD YOU DON'T DROP IN TO GAMBLE AT MY DEUCE-TRAY SALOON! WITH YOUR LUCK YOU'D BREAK ME IN A WEEK!
I'LL TELL YOU A SECRET, JACK... WHEN YOU GAMBLE ON HUMAN DECENCY YOU'RE USUALLY GAMBLING ON A SURE THING! I NEVER LOSE!

"SNOWING!" jerked out Tom Hall. "Gosh, I'm cold!"

"You're not the only one," laughed Dick Barrington. "How much farther, Gordon?"

There was no reply.

"*Gordon!*" In a panic from the third member of the trio of boys. "Gordon? Where——"

"Easy, chaps!" It was the strange, all-seeing, all-knowing Gordon Gregory who broke in. Mounted on a big black stallion, he had come like a shadow out of the failing light of the long, twisting trail that ran, for the most part, between high walls of rock between Virginia City and Bannock in South-west Montana. "I want you to dismount at the bend yonder. You'll find a rocky gully. Walk y'r ponies up a matter of twenty yards and stay put. The stage should be here directly."

"But——" began Tom Hall.

"Don't argue," roughly from Gordon. "Get busy!"

Five minutes later their strange guide through the Wild West of many years ago had joined T., D. and H. He looked anxious and motioned his companions to follow him on foot. The four crept forward until they overlooked the winding road, perhaps the most dangerous highway in the world at that time—October 1863.

"Now listen," hissed Gordon Gregory. "You'll be seeing a hold-up, but you're not to make a move unless I say so. I just want to take a note of something. There's plenty of trouble around here and, normally, I should know what it is, but I don't. It just happens to be like that. But I've got to put things right and the only way for me to do that is to take a good look at the fellows concerned in this hold-up. Savvy?"

Dick shook his head. "Afraid I don't," he admitted, "but I guess y'r the boss on this trip, Gordon, and I'm not exactly pining to get back to that modern train heading

northwards to New York and then England, home and beauty. Care to make yourself any clearer?"

"Eh?" Gordon hadn't been listening. "Er—n-no," he said slowly. "I've told you we're an hour out of Rattlesnake Creek stagecoach station near Bannock. You know the month and the year and that's what you've got to be satisfied with for the time being. I—— Sssst!" He gripped Dick's arm and the four were silent as they heard the approach of the stage, the rather muffled thud-thud, thud-thud of horses' hoofs, the creak of wheels that needed greasing and an occasional snapping crack of a whip.

"Wouldn't the bandits have seen us?" whispered Dick.

"No! They've only just shown up. This gang has things well timed and well planned. Quiet now!"

Now, above the other sounds, came the raucous shouts of the stagecoach driver, poor Bill Rumsey who, with a makeshift team, was making the best time possible to Bannock. He'd had one heck of a time at Rattlesnake Creek trying to find horses to change for the nags he'd got in the traces, but quite without success; thus he knew that if any road agents held him up he'd have no chance at all of outstripping them.

"Come *up*!" he roared at the poor nags and his whip cracked over the flea-bitten ears even though Bill could scarce lift the thing for his aching muscles.

"Now!" whispered Gordon in the ears of his companions. "The big tree, boys, the big tree!"

Then it happened. The thrill of a lifetime.

Two horsemen came out of the shadows and in that failing light T., D. and H. saw that they were masked.

Crash!

A single shot rang out and instantly the four watchers heard the scared voice of the stage-driver. "Whoa!" he bawled. "Whoa—baaaack!" The creaking wheels slithered over the thin layer of snow and Bill Rumsey's hands were stretched skywards over his head.

T., D. and H. did not see Gordon leave them in his usual mysterious, silent manner. They were too absorbed in watching, not on a screen but in real life, the robbing of the occupants of that stage from the fabulous Virginia City.

"Get that sack from Bummer Dan," growled a voice. "I'm durned sure it's got the best part of five thousand in dust in it. No you don't!" There was a crash and a squeal from someone inside the coach. "Next time I won't miss, Dan," snarled that same voice. "O.K. I'll take it. Now, driver——" A laugh. "On y'r way, man, on y'r way. Reckon them nags you had to rustle up two stages back ain't 'xactly as fresh as daisies."

Less than a minute later the stage rattled by the hiding-place of the three boys, the masked men had vanished once more like shadows and the long, twisty road was deserted.

"O.K.," came Gordon's voice. "Let's go."

His companions said nothing until they were two more miles nearer Bannock. Then Dick broke the strained silence. "Well, Gordon?" he asked. "Did you get what you wanted?"

"You bet!" There was triumph in that voice. "I should have known, but I guess I'd forgotten."

"Care to tell us?"

"No!" shortly. "All I'll tell you is that, if we're lucky, we'll be seeing more excite-

ment before the next dawn than you've had on y'r trips with me so far. Hustle up your ponies, fellows, it's still a fair ride into Bannock."

It was a weary ride and Tom, Dick and Harry were nearly dead-beat when they finally slipped through the huddle of houses, shacks and huts, with some brightly lighted saloons here and there, of Bannock, Montana. Gordon slipped from his pony and, signing to the others to follow him, walked boldly to the door of Dance and Stuart's store. A fist crashed on the stout wood and then came the sound of bolts being withdrawn.

"It's me, Jack," came Gordon's voice. "Can we come in?"

"Sure!" The storekeeper, Jack Dalley, hastened to get the four inside before relocking and rebolting the door. "In here," he called over his shoulder. "There ain't no windows to this room. Better that way."

Gordon grunted by way of reply, and a moment or two later they were all in a brightly lighted room which boasted three oil lamps and a roaring fire. There was a black bottle and a glass on the table, as well as the heel of a crusty loaf and a huge chunk of cheese. The visitors had obviously disturbed the storekeeper in the middle of a meal.

Dick exchanged glances with his two pals before taking the seat indicated by his host and peeling off his gauntlets. The room was more like an oven than anything else and this was almost too much of a change from the wintry scene outside. However, it didn't seem to bother Gordon Gregory or the storekeeper. "Drink?" asked the latter; then he grinned as he splashed three fingers of red-eye into the glass. "No! I guess not!" he added, almost to himself.

His teeth rattled against the glass as he drank.

"The fellow's as nervous as a kitten," whispered Tom in Dick's ear. "What's all this mean?"

"Shush!" Dick shook a warning head. "Leave it to Gordon. I'm trying hard to remember something, but——" He shrugged and lapsed into silence once more.

"Anything happen on the way here?" Jack Dalley asked the leader of the four. "I kinda expected you guys sooner. I was just havin' supper before turnin' in."

"Yes," said Gordon. "Plenty happened." And he told of the hold-up.

The storekeeper's face lost what little colour it possessed. "Reckon I'm getting out of Montana soon as I can find some other fellow to take over. Bannock's one heck of a town, Gordon, as you'll find out soon enough. What's brought you here?" he added suddenly.

"You!"

"Me?" The man gulped down his drink. "Oh, sure!" he went on. "You mean my message."

Gordon nodded.

"But you were heading this way before this?"

Again Gordon nodded.

"Then——" began the man, but T., D. and H.'s friend interrupted him. He leaned forward in his chair and halted the man as he was about to pour out another shot of red-eye.

"Listen, Jack," he said steadily, "supposing you tell me why you invited the boys and me to stay here. Supposing you tell me what the jitters are all about, and supposing you tell me just how *much* gold you've got in this store."

"*Gold?*" Jack Dalley jumped to his feet so quickly that his chair crashed backwards to the floor and he stood, trembling, with his palms pressed down hard on the table in front of him, as if to gain courage and strength from close contact with something solid and real. "What are you blabbing about? I've got no gold, I've got——"

"How *much*?" came Gordon's quietest voice.

The man picked up the chair and sank into it. His eyes shifted restlessly in his head and he swallowed hard as he answered. "Eighty thousand dollars, Gordon," he got out at last. "It's in an iron safe in the office. I'm skeered, feller, I'm dead skeered. You've got to do something. This town's crackling with badmen and the sheriff don't do a thing about it. What's he doing about that hold-up you've just told me about——?"

"He won't know about it yet," put in Dick.

"Sure!" The storekeeper shifted his gaze to look in the boy's direction. "But when he does he'll do nothing. 'Cos why? 'Cos he's skeered of the 'Innocents,' same as everyone else. They've got away with murder in Bannock and Virginia City, fellers, and the whole State knows it. There ain't nothing too big for them. Yes," he was looking at Gordon again, "that's why I invited you here. Don't leave me! Please don't leave me. I've got a posse of twenty-five men leaving in the morning to escort that gold to the railhead; I'm not taking any chances. Meantime, however, there's no one I can trust in Bannock to see that the gold is here to *be* escorted in the morning. The posse doesn't come from here. I've collected guys I can trust and——" Of a sudden the speaker broke off and bounded to his feet again as the sound of a muffled shot penetrated that windowless room.

Gordon took command. "Take it easy, Jack," he said soothingly. "Sit down and take some more of that poison y'r pouring into your system. Get us some coffee and

have some yourself. I always say there's nothing like hot, black, sweet coffee to pull you together."

"What was that shooting?" put in Harry who, up to then, had remained the quietest of all.

"Some durned miner with an itching trigger-finger, I expect," came the matter-of-fact reply. "There's plenty of that in Bannock." He turned again to the storekeeper. who had not accepted the suggestion of another drink. "How about that coffee, Jack?" he asked.

"Sure! I'll get it!" The man tottered to the door with one of the lamps and closed it after him.

"Now, chaps," said Gordon briskly. "I think it's time I gave you a little information. At the moment we're sitting on a small mountain of pure dynamite——" He laughed as Tom wriggled uncomfortably. "Don't take me too literally, Tom," he went on. "What I mean is that we're right in the heart of the worst town in western Montana. Remember that the road from Virginia City to Bannock is the most dangerous, perhaps, in the world, that there's eighty thousand dollars' worth of gold right here in this store and it wants several hours to daylight. What's more, Henry Plummer is sheriff of Bannock and Virginia City."

"*Plummer?*" gasped Dick. "What do I know of him?"

Gordon shrugged. "Can't say unless you tell me. Anyway, he's a queer fellow. Once a bandit, he met a nice girl, married her and seemed to settle down. He was elected sheriff about seven or eight months ago, first of Bannock and then, when the lode was struck at Virginia City, of the whole district. He's a handsome man and, because he was once wounded in the right hand, learned to shoot as well with the left so that he's now twice as deadly with a six-gun. He's got a couple of old buddies as

deputy sheriffs, fellows named Ned Ray and Cyrus Skinner. They're as tough as Plummer and all three are as tough as Bannock and Virginia City combined, but——"

"But what, Gordon?"

The question came from Jack Dalley, in the doorway with a pot of hot coffee and some mugs on a tray in his shaking hands.

"But he can't put a stop to what's been going on in Bannock, Jack!" finished Gordon. Then he changed the subject in that way of his that brooked no argument. "Put the coffee down, man, and let's see if it is as hot as we like it." There was a longish pause. "Aaaah!" sighed Gordon, gulping noisily and with obvious enjoyment, a strange thing for him. "That's better! Now," he continued, "sit down, Jack, and stop worrying. We're staying right here until that posse of yours moves off with that eighty thousand in gold."

The storekeeper looked his heartfelt relief. Colour came back to his cheeks and, for a while, he chatted quite contentedly as he sipped his coffee, the red-eye quite forgotten. Indeed, Tom, Dick and Harry sensed that he was not really a drinking man but had been driven to take too much of the poisonous stuff that went by the name of whisky by the worry of his responsibilities as storekeeper.

An hour passed and the three boys were becoming drowsy; indeed, Tom and Harry had actually dozed off for a few minutes, when they were roused by a thunderous knocking on the street door.

Jack Dalley scrambled to his feet and stood blinking. He, too, had been dozing and the shock of that sudden pounding on the door had, in consequence, been doubly serious. His hands shook as he clasped them nervously in front of him.

Bang! Bang!

Again there came that pounding.

"Answer it, Jack," snapped Gordon. "Maybe it's y'r pals who aim to make up the posse."

Relief beamed in the man's face. "Sure. Oh, sure!" he managed to get out. "They said they may get here a little early." He moved towards the door.

"Take y'r gun, Jack!" said Gordon softly.

A thought came into Dick Barrington's head. Was this seemingly innocent storekeeper really anything but innocent? He braced his body, ready to move quickly if anything untoward happened, but the man merely nodded, returned to the table and picked up a six-shooter. Twirling the chambers, he slipped it into the holster on his right hip, well forward, and walked quickly back to the door just as there came a third heavy pounding outside.

"Come on!" hissed Gordon as the door closed. "Keep behind me."

With hearts pounding against their ribs Tom, Dick and Harry followed him into the narrow passage outside, just in time to hear the door being unlocked and the heavy bolts withdrawn. Tom gripped Dick's arm and his fingers were like a steel vice. Then came Jack Dalley's voice.

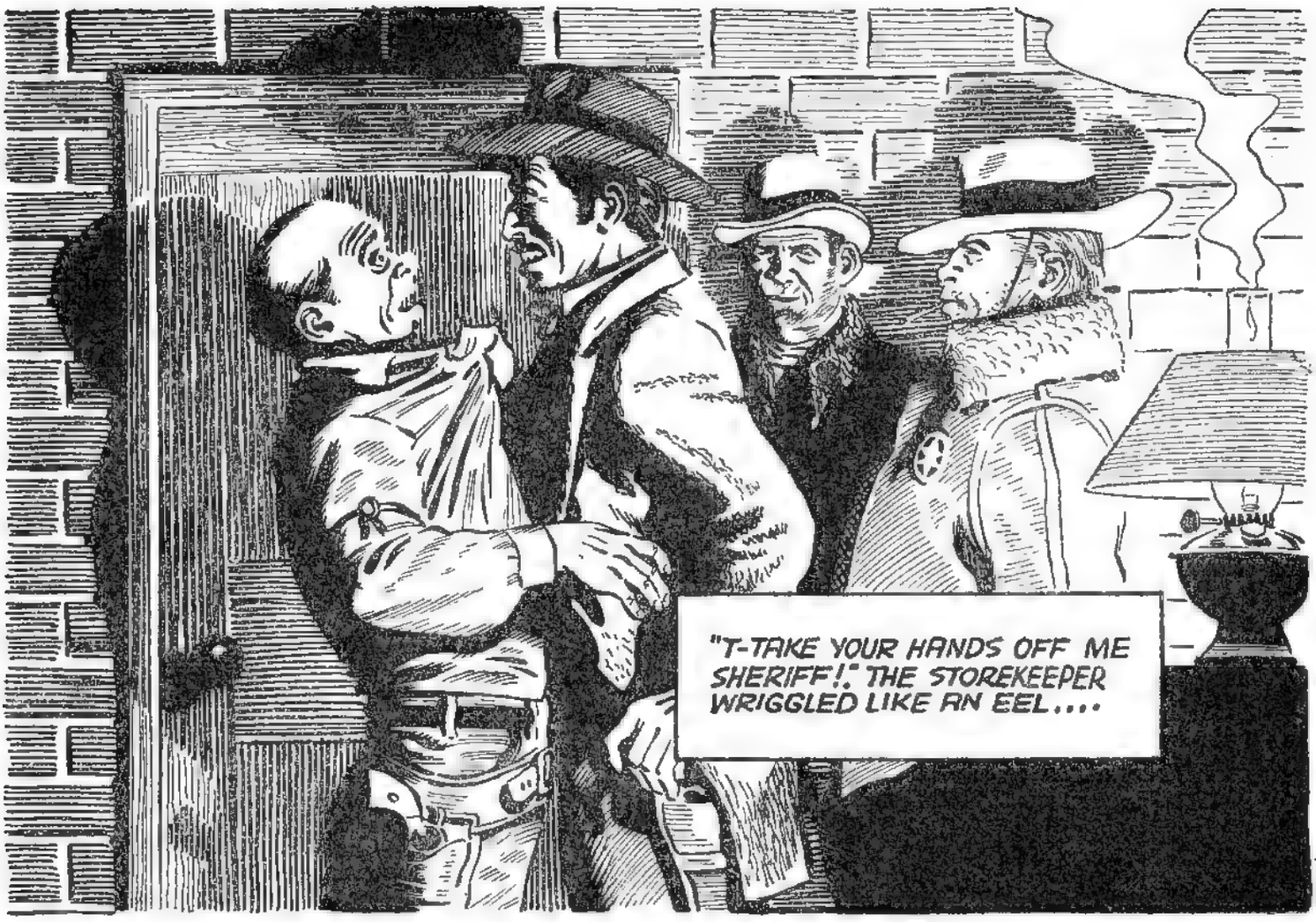
"Who is it?"

"Open up, Jack," came the reply. "It's the law, man. Three slices of the law, i'fact."

The boys heard the storekeeper's gasp of relief and then a further gasp. "*Sheriff?*" he almost shouted.

"Sure——" It was not an unpleasant voice. "Who did you think it was, huh? Ned, Cyrus and me are the law, ain't we? We've come to see that you ain't been robbed."

"There's no need——" began the agitated storekeeper.



"Out of my way, Mister!" came the drawling tones of Henry Plummer, elected sheriff of Bannock and Virginia City, not to mention the district in between that teemed with road agents and no-good hoodlums of every kind. "Reckon I'd just like to make sure."

"You can't——"

"I can and I am, Mister!" rasped the sheriff. "Maybe a storekeeper ain't above suspicion." A pause. "Keep that six-shooter of yours right where it is."

There was the tramping of feet and Gordon swiftly dragged his friends back into the room without windows. They heard the sheriff, his two deputies and Jack Dalley pass the door on their way to the latter's office. Then Gordon, fingers to lips, beckoned T., D. and H. The four finally halted by the open door of the office.

"Is Jack——?" began Tom in a whisper.

"Quiet!" warningly from Gordon.

"O.K., Mister," said Sheriff Henry Plummer. "Open up. I want to make sure that that gold is right where it should be."

"No," came in frightened tones from the storekeeper. "I'm not supposed to touch it until it's time to send it to the railhead." The man's tone changed. "Look here, Sheriff," he spluttered. "What's the idea of all this, huh? Why aren't you out looking for the fellows who robbed the stage this evening . . .?"

"You little rat!" Peering through the door, Dick Barrington saw a tall, handsome man wearing a sheriff's badge holding the shivering Jack Dalley by his bunched-up shirt and shaking him. "How do you know the stage was robbed, huh? Answer or, by thunder, I'll——"

"T-take y'r hands off me, Sheriff!" The storekeeper wriggled like an eel and

managed to free himself. Then he backed against a wall. "It's all over town," he said. "Why shouldn't I know?"

Sheriff Henry Plummer stood straddle-legged in the centre of the room. "O.K.," he drawled. "Maybe I acted a mite hasty. Open that safe, let me make sure that the gold's all right and I'll stay right here 'til those fellows you've engaged as a posse show up." The boys saw a heavy Navy-type six-shooter swinging loosely in the man's hand. They also saw Jack Dalley throw a despairing glance over his shoulder.

Dick looked at Gordon. The latter shook his head.

"Open up!" The order came from one of the deputies, a thin, sharp-featured man with a mouthful of broken teeth.

With a groan the storekeeper fumbled in a pocket of his shirt and produced a key. He bent down and inserted it in the lock of the safe. The door swung back and, in the lamplight, the watching boys saw that the safe was practically filled with canvas bags and a few oblong boxes.

For once Gordon Gregory was a trifle slow. He missed the raised foot of Cyrus Skinner, deputy sheriff of Bannock and Virginia County, and thus the toe of a boot caught the unlucky storekeeper behind the right ear and pitched him sideways in an inert heap before anyone could move.

"Hurry!" snapped Henry Plummer.

"Now!" rasped Gordon, and he stepped into the room.

Crash! His six-gun blazed in a thunderous roar of sound and Cyrus Skinner paid dearly for that cowardly kick. Indeed, he was still nursing a shattered wrist days after Jack Dalley was as perky as he had ever been in his life. But there was no time for jubilation over the downfall of a scoundrel. As the three boys also moved in, guns at the ready, Gordon's voice shrilled in their ears.

"Take cover!" he screamed.

None too soon, T., D. and H. flung themselves behind a stuffed and littered roll-topped desk. Shots whistled across the room and the bags and boxes of gold cascaded out in a heap from the safe as a ·45 slug made one of them a target.

"Come out with y'r hands up!" came Sheriff Plummer's voice. "You haven't a chance of getting clear."

Gordon put a warning hand on Tom Hall's arm as the latter opened his mouth to reply.

Crash! Crash! Crash!

Three more shots crashed into the desk, splintering the woodwork and forcing the fellows taking shelter behind it to crouch even lower.

"We can't hold out, Gordon," whispered Harry Dalby. "What do we do?"

"Hold out!" came the reply. "Don't panic, Harry. Plummer's poison all right, but I guess we've got the antidote to his brand of poison at last. Take a peek at poor Jack Dalley."

It needed only a glance to see that the storekeeper had recovered from that blow on the head. Only his hand moved, and that slowly, but it was enough. Inch by inch that groping hand moved towards its owner's own gun, still in its holster. Several more shots were flung at that desk and T., D. and H. could hear the groaning of the injured Cyrus.

"Let's get out of here!" moaned the deputy. "They'll hang us if we're caught, Henry."

"Stay where you are!" came the snarling reply. "I'm sheriff of this town and it's my duty to look after private property. I aim to——"

"Put y'r hands up, Sheriff!"

From where Jack Dalley lay, propped on one elbow and with his gun in his hand, came a steady voice. The boys could just see the storekeeper diagonally from where they crouched behind the desk, but the three others were out of their range of vision. They were struck by the steadiness of the injured man's voice and the equal steadiness of the hand that held the gun. He spoke again. "Drop those guns, Plummer. You too, Ray. Best do as y'r pal Skinner's doing."

Sheriff Henry Plummer's answer was a ·45 slug, and the boys saw the storekeeper roll over a split second before the shot rang out. Then came other shots from both sides and, to his relief, Harry Dalby was able to see that Jack Dalley had taken shelter behind an overturned table that was already badly splintered with shots.

"I'll have you hanged for this, Dalley," the sheriff was shouting. "You let those gold thieves in and by thunder I'll——" He broke off as the half-closed door crashed back on its hinges and, quite suddenly, the room was filled with men. One, a tall, black-haired fellow with a barrel-like chest and a wide-brimmed Stetson pushed to the back of his head, held two six-shooters and they were levelled at the heads of the sheriff and his one remaining, uninjured deputy.

"So it was you, Plummer!" the man drawled. "We kinda figured that a bandit once is a bandit most of the time. On y'r feet, Plummer. We'll give you a fair trial, which is more than you've given to many poor guys, but I guess that doesn't mean you'll escape hanging."

Sheriff Henry Plummer said nothing as they took away his gun and his badge.

Meanwhile, other men had helped the storekeeper to his feet and soon he was busy bundling the gold back into the safe. He locked the door again and pocketed the key just as Gordon Gregory, with Tom, Dick and Harry behind him, came into the centre of the room.

"How are you, Jim?" he said, as he held out a hand to the tall, dark-haired man.

"Heck!" exploded Jim Williams, head of the Vigilantes hastily formed to run down the band known as the "Innocents." "I shouldn't be surprised to see you, lad, but I guess I am. Did you know that this fellow"—he nodded towards Plummer—"was at the head of the whole durned outfit?" The speaker had also shaken hands with Tom, Dick and Harry as he was speaking, and now he stuck thumbs in his belt and beamed upon the quartette. "We didn't know it ourselves 'til a couple of days ago——" The speaker shrugged. "Waal," he drawled, "maybe four days. We've been ridin' around, getting wise to guys like Buck Stinson and George Ives, so durned long that time doesn't mean such a lot to us right now."

Gordon's grin widened. "I should have known," he answered, "but it just happened that I didn't—not until a few 'Innocents' held up the stage, then I recognised a fellow called Billy Bunton. That told me the whole story and I reckoned that Plummer would make a bid for the gold in that safe and then pull out. Where's Billy?" he finished.

Jim Williams grinned.

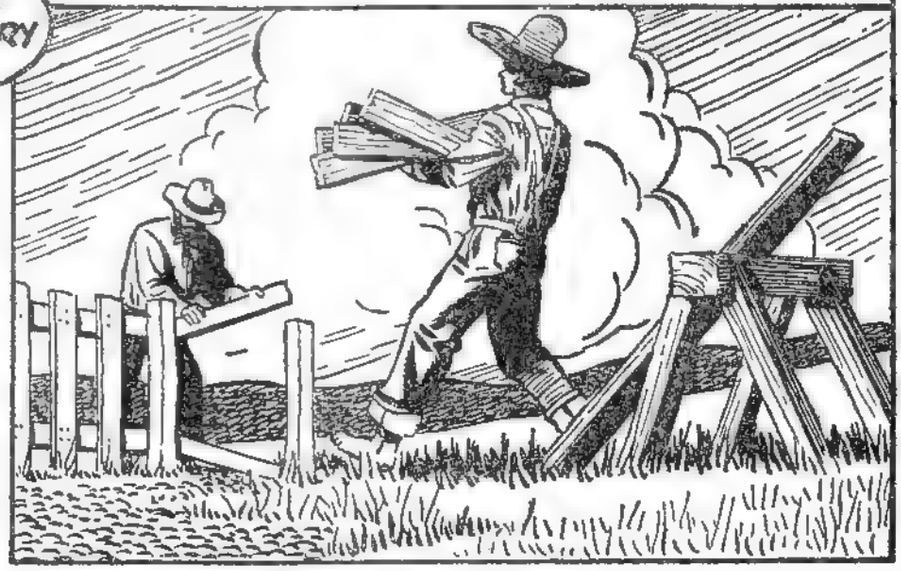
"Right where the rest of 'em are," he answered. "In jail. Yep, where all crooks land up sooner or later——" A pause. "The poor fools!"

The Saga of SALT LAKE City

WAAL, GORDON, RECKON YOU'VE GOT A STORY BEHIND THAT SMILE OF YOURS..
RATHER! SPIN IT GORDON!
OKAY FELLERS. IT'S THE TRUE STORY OF THOSE MORMONS!

SLIPPING THROUGH TIME AS ONLY GORDON COULD DO THIS-THE FOUR BOYS REACH JEFFREY'S CANYON IN WYOMING. WHO SHOULD THEY MEET RIDING WESTWARDS INTO NEBRASKA BUT BILL CODY.....BUFFALO BILL, DELIGHTED TO MEET HIS YOUNG FRIENDS DECIDED TO CAMP THE NIGHT WITH THEM.....

"WELL" BEGAN GORDON "THE FOUNDER OF THE RELIGIOUS SECT KNOWN AS THE MORMONS WAS JOSEPH SMITH, WHO, AS A BOY, HELPED HIS FATHER ON A SMALL FARM IN VERMONT..."



"..... BUT JOSEPH SMITH WAS DESTINED FOR GREAT THINGS. A RELIGIOUS YOUNG MAN, HE FOUNDED THE SECT CALLED MORMONS. ALTHOUGH MANY FOLLOWED AND HE PROSPERED, HE AND ALL HIS MORMONS WERE PERSECUTED AND, BEING ARRESTED IN ILLINOIS IN 1844 HE WAS KILLED WHEN A MOB BROKE INTO THE JAIL . . . . . "

HE WON'T GET FREE MEN! DRAG HIM OUT AND HANG THE BLIGHTER!

LYNCH HIM!

OUT WITH HIM!

I MUST GO BACK AT ONCE!

NO! YOU ARE IN GREAT DANGER!

"BUT THAT DID'NT FINISH THE MORMONS" CONTINUED GORDON "THE NEWS BEING BROUGHT TO BRIGHAM YOUNG, SMITH'S FIRST LIEUTENANT AS IT WERE, WHILE HE WAS ON A BOSTON RAILWAY STATION WAITING FOR A TRAIN . . . . . "

"...THE NEW LEADER OF THE MORMONS HURRIED TO ILLINOIS AND THERE TOLD HIS FOLLOWERS THAT THEY MUST ALL LEAVE FOR THE WILDERNESS THAT LAY BEYOND THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER . . . . . "

WE MUST LEAVE THIS PLACE OF INTOLERANCE...

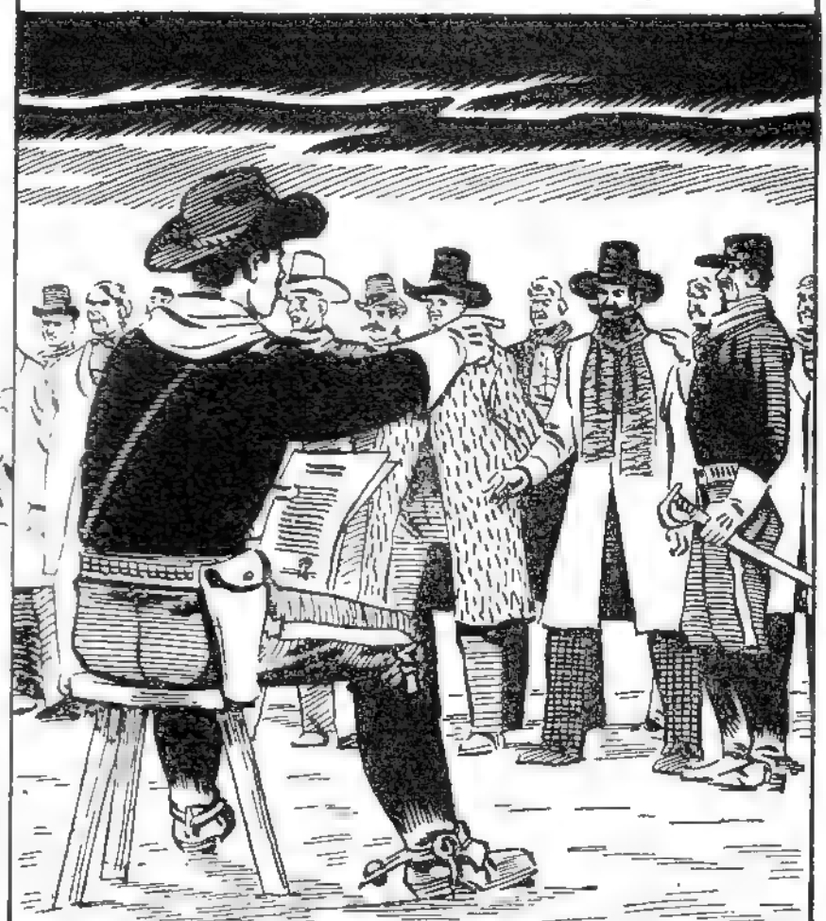
FEB. 1846

"THE VANGUARD LEFT WITH A BAND AT ITS HEAD" WENT ON GORDON SLOWLY "AND IT WAS MORE LIKE THE MARCH OF A CONQUERING ARMY THAN THE FLIGHT OF A POVERTY-STRICKEN RELIGIOUS SECT . . . . . "

"... THEY CROSSED THE FROZEN WATERS OF THE MISSISSIPPI.."

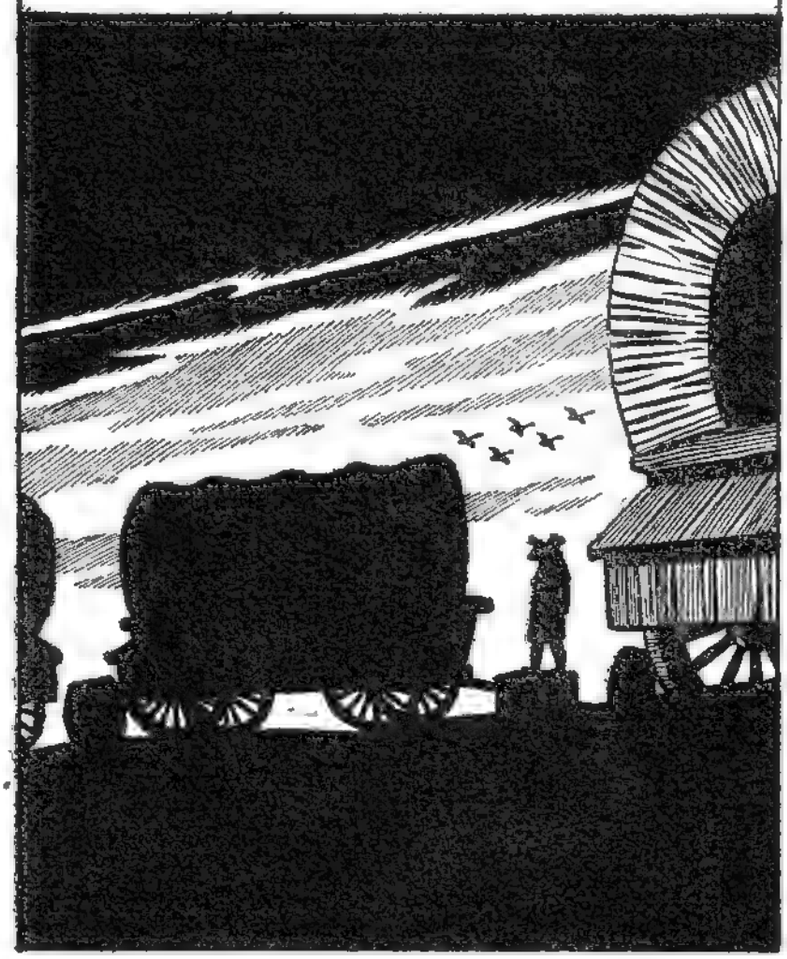
"... BUT THERE WAS MORE TROUBLE WAITING FOR THEM. AS THEY MOVED ONWARDS A TROOP OF SOLDIERS OVERTOOK THEM ....."

"... THERE WERE A THOUSAND FAMILIES IN THAT PROCESSION AND THERE WAS GREAT DISTRESS WHEN THE MILITARY TOOK FIVE HUNDRED MEN TO FIGHT IN THE WAR WITH MEXICO ....."

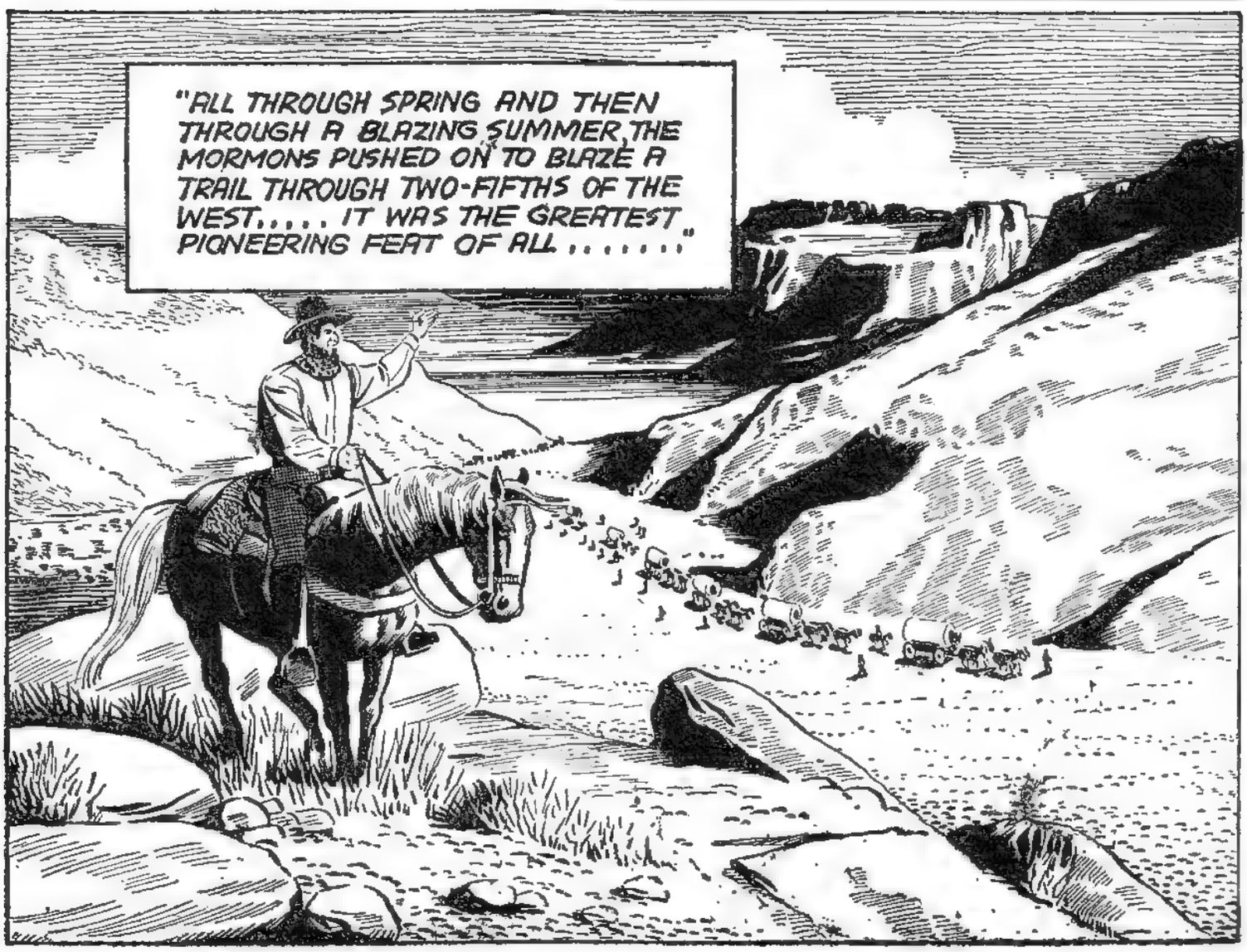


"STILL THEY STRUGGLED ON" CONTINUED GORDON "AND BRIGHAM YOUNG WAS HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE, AS HE HELPED THE AGED AND WEAK....."

"EVERY MORNING AT FIVE O'CLOCK A BUGLER GAVE THE SIGNAL FOR RISING. BREAKFAST WAS EATEN AT SEVEN AND THEN THE MARCH WAS RESUMED..."

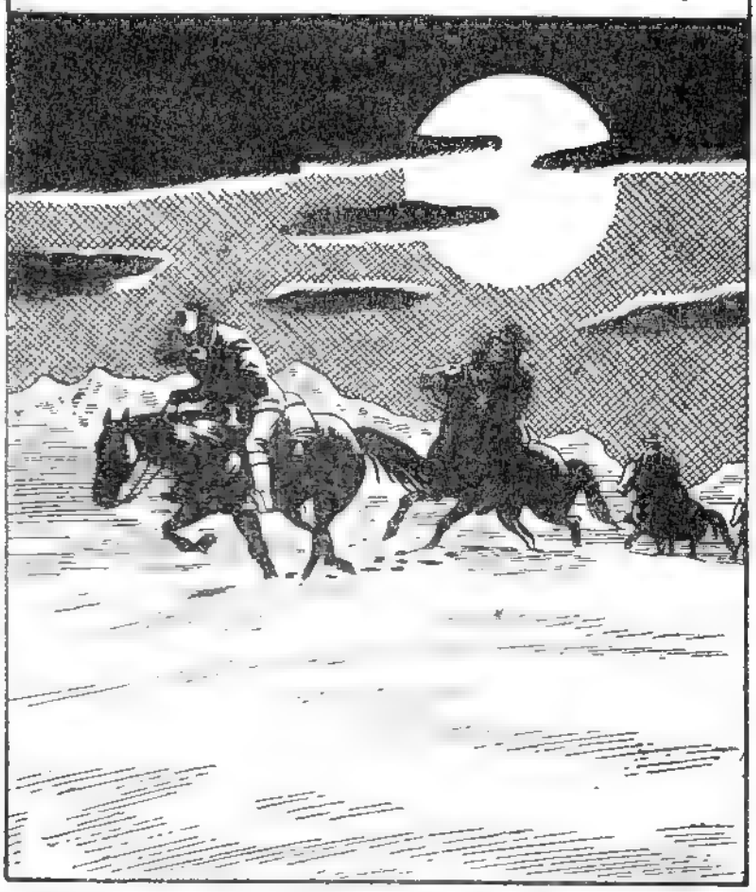


"ALL THROUGH SPRING AND THEN THROUGH A BLAZING SUMMER, THE MORMONS PUSHED ON TO BLAZE A TRAIL THROUGH TWO-FIFTHS OF THE WEST..... IT WAS THE GREATEST PIONEERING FEAT OF ALL....."

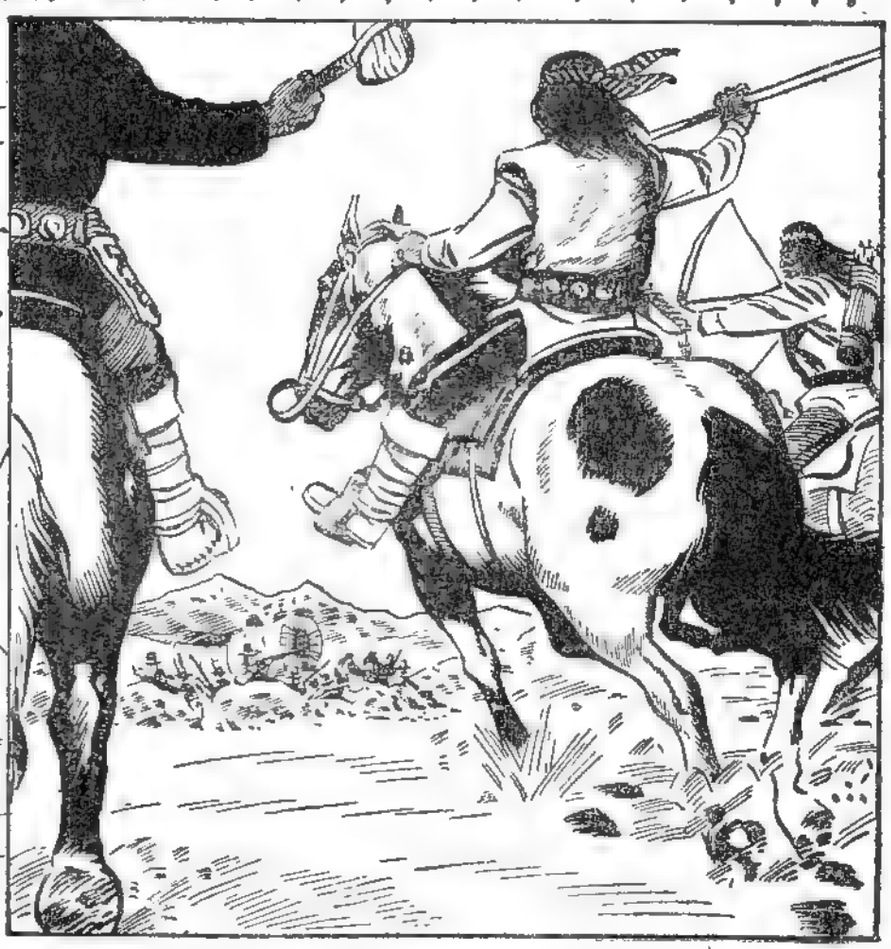


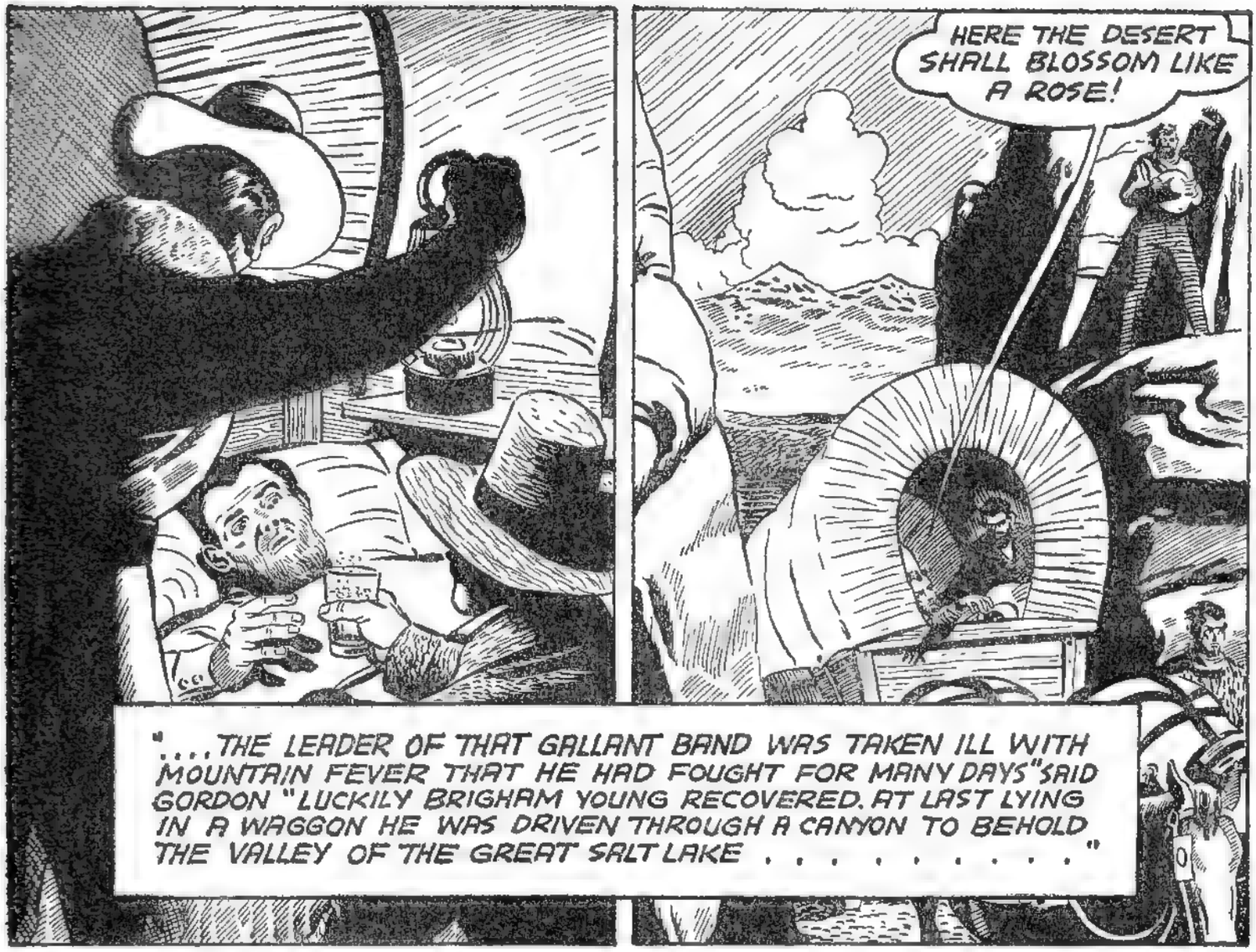
"ONE OF THE WONDERFUL THINGS ABOUT THE MARCH OF THE MORMONS" SAID GORDON "WAS THE FACT THAT EVERY EVENING FROM EIGHT-O'CLOCK THOSE WHO HAD THE STRENGTH LEFT, DANCED AND SANG WHILE THE BAND PLAYED STIRRING MUSIC . . . . . "

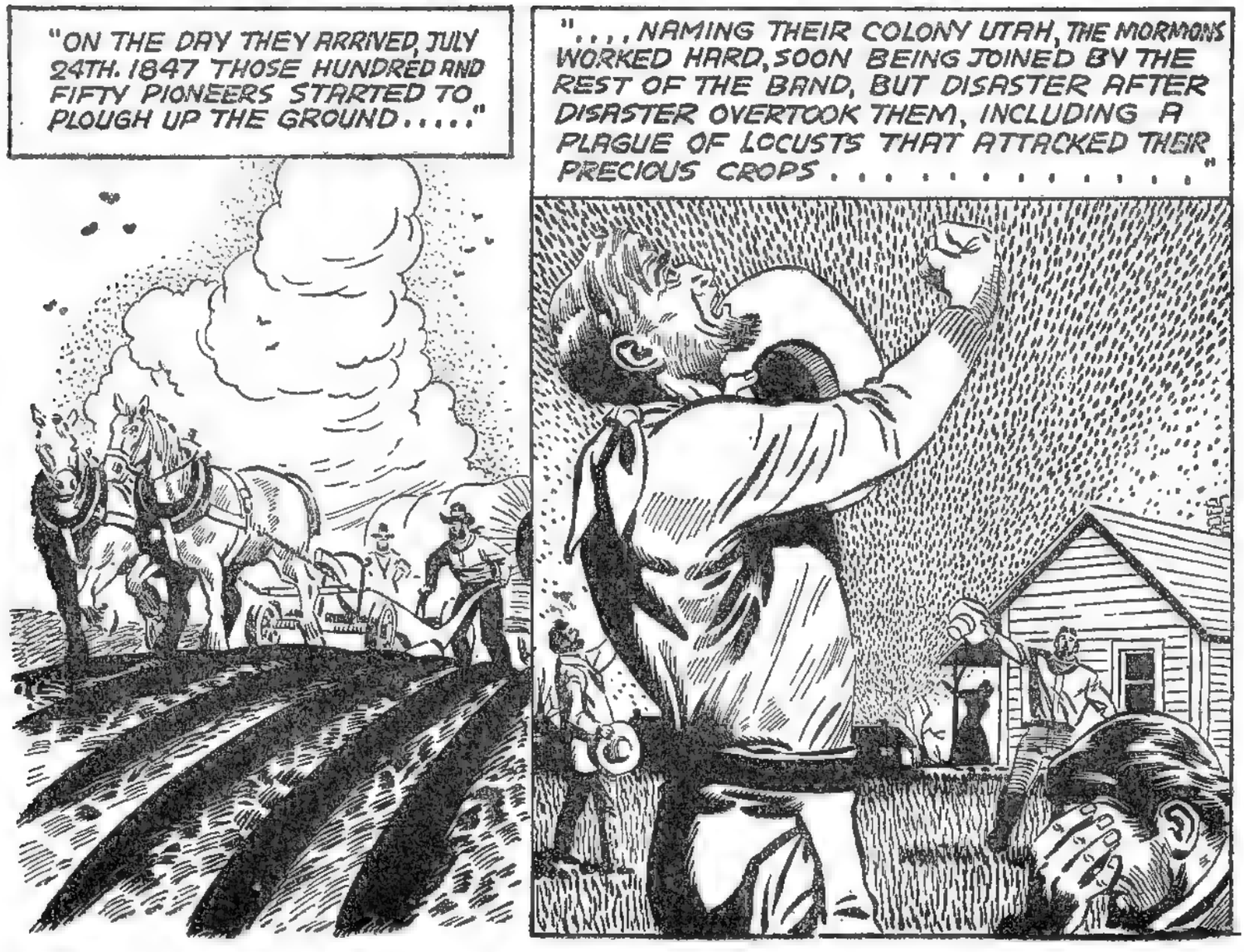
". . . BUT WHEN THE SNOWS CAME AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NEXT WINTER BRIGHAM YOUNG WAS COMPELLED TO GO INTO WINTER QUARTERS, ALTHOUGH HE AND A SELECTED BAND OF ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY FOLLOWERS WERE TO PUSH ON . . . . . "



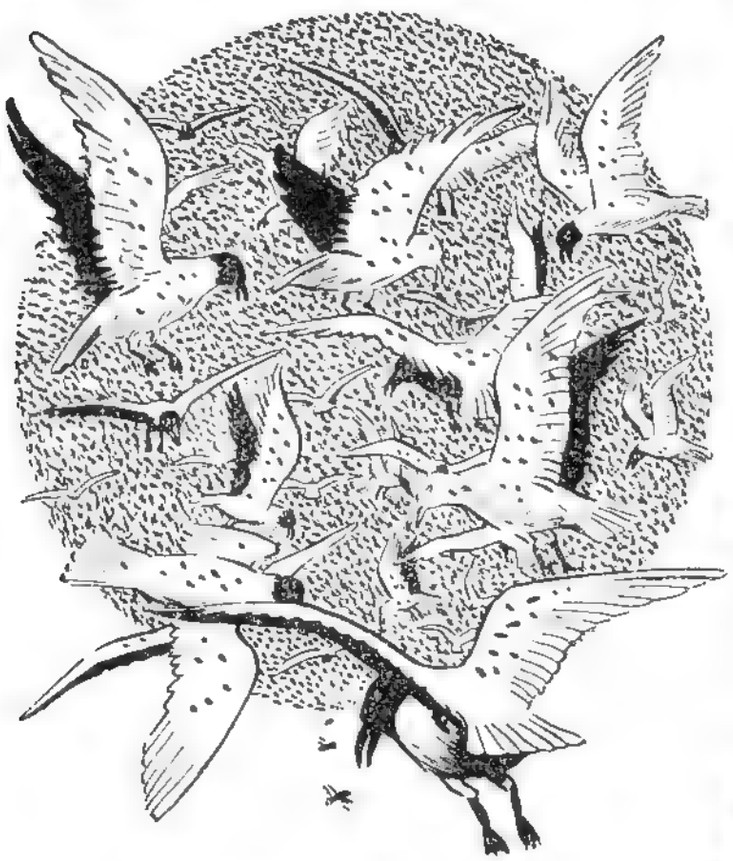
"BRIGHAM YOUNG HAD HEARD FROM AN OLD SCOUT, JIM BRIDGER, OF THE VALLEY OF THE GREAT SALT LAKE ON THE OVERLAND ROUTE TO CALIFORNIA, A COMPLETELY VIRGIN COUNTRY" SAID GORDON. "LEAVING THE MAIN BODY IN THEIR WINTER CAMP, YOUNG AND HIS SELECT BAND PUSHED ON IN ICY WEATHER, TO BE ATTACKED BY APACHES MANY TIMES ON THAT TERRIBLE TRIP ACROSS ALMOST UNTRODDEN TERRITORY TOWARDS THE GREAT SALT LAKE. THEN . . . . . "



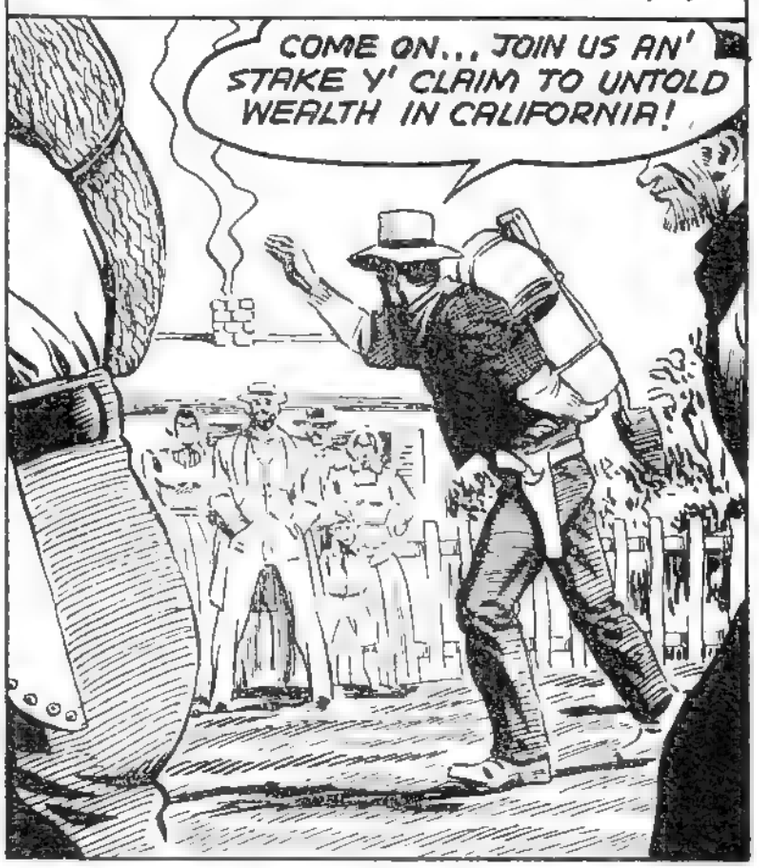

HERE THE DESERT SHALL BLOSSOM LIKE A ROSE!
"....THE LEADER OF THAT GALLANT BAND WAS TAKEN ILL WITH MOUNTAIN FEVER THAT HE HAD FOUGHT FOR MANY DAYS" SAID GORDON "LUCKILY BRIGHAM YOUNG RECOVERED. AT LAST LYING IN A WAGGON HE WAS DRIVEN THROUGH A CANYON TO BEHOLD THE VALLEY OF THE GREAT SALT LAKE . . . . . ."

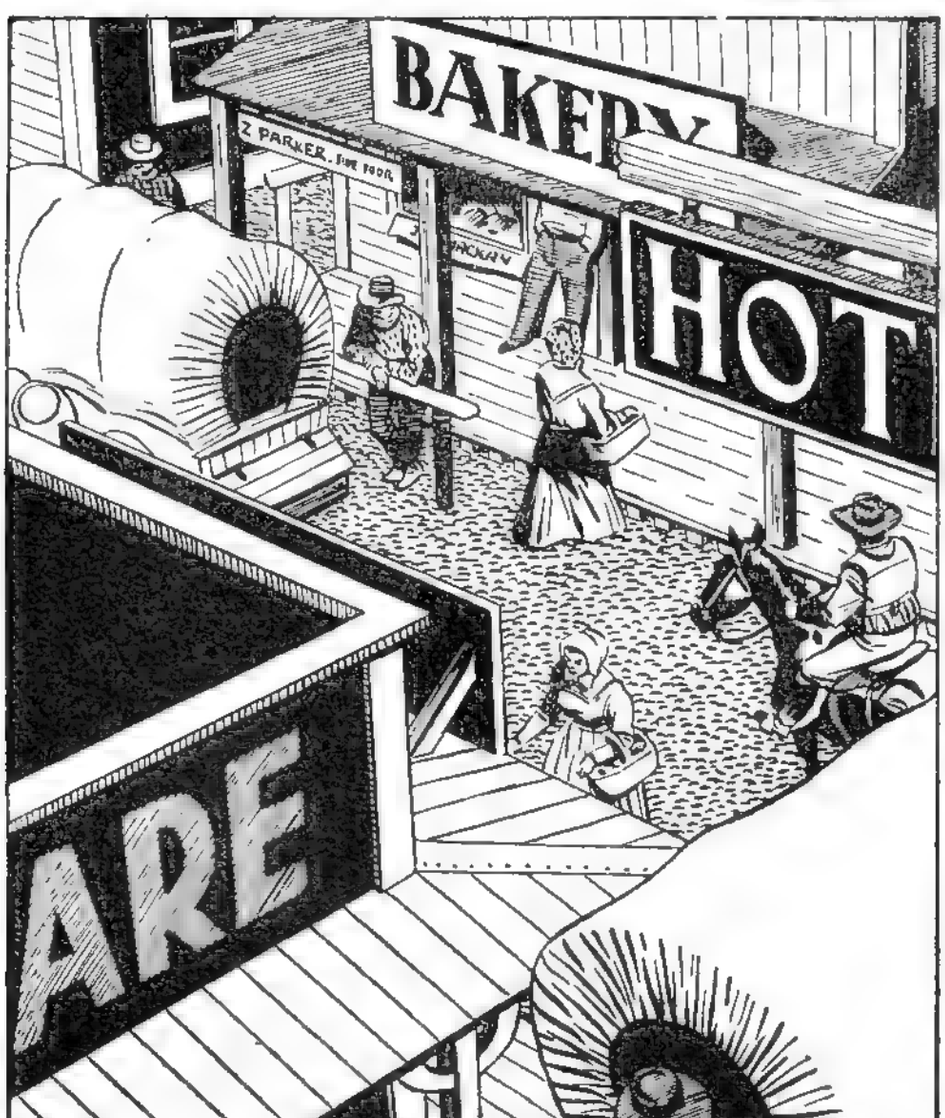

"ON THE DAY THEY ARRIVED, JULY 24TH. 1847 THOSE HUNDRED AND FIFTY PIONEERS STARTED TO PLOUGH UP THE GROUND....."
"....NAMING THEIR COLONY UTAH, THE MORMONS WORKED HARD, SOON BEING JOINED BY THE REST OF THE BAND, BUT DISASTER AFTER DISASTER OVERTOOK THEM, INCLUDING A PLAGUE OF LOCUSTS THAT ATTACKED THEIR PRECIOUS CROPS . . . . . ."

"THEN CAME AN AMAZING THING" WENT ON THE TALE-TELLER "FOR THOUSANDS OF SEAGULLS APPEARED FROM HUNDREDS AND HUNDREDS OF MILES AWAY AND ATE ALL THE LOCUSTS . . . . . "

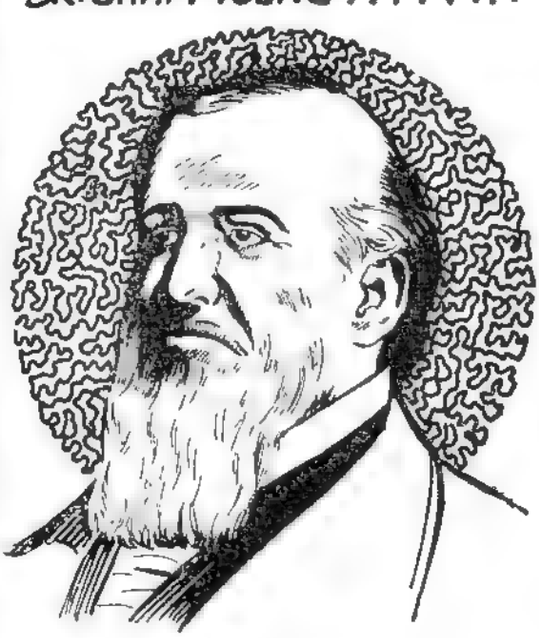


"ALL WENT WELL FOR A LITTLE WHILE, BUT SUDDENLY, WITH GOLD DISCOVERED IN CALIFORNIA, PROSPECTORS FLOCKED TO THAT LONELY COUNTRY AND THE PEACE OF THE MORMONS WAS DISTURBED" SAID GORDON "ALL THE SAME FOR THAT . . . . . "





"... SALT LAKE CITY GREW RAPIDLY BUT IT WAS NOT UNTIL 1896 THAT UTAH, WITH SALT LAKE CITY AS ITS CAPITAL WAS ADMITTED INTO THE UNION AS A STATE. BY THAT TIME HOWEVER, THE MORMONS WERE A HEALTHY, BUSY AND PROSPEROUS COMMUNITY WITH MANY FINE BUILDINGS, THANKS TO THE LEADERSHIP AND WISDOM OF THAT GREAT PIONEER OF THE WILD WEST, BRIGHAM YOUNG . . . . . "



THE INDIAN FIGHTER

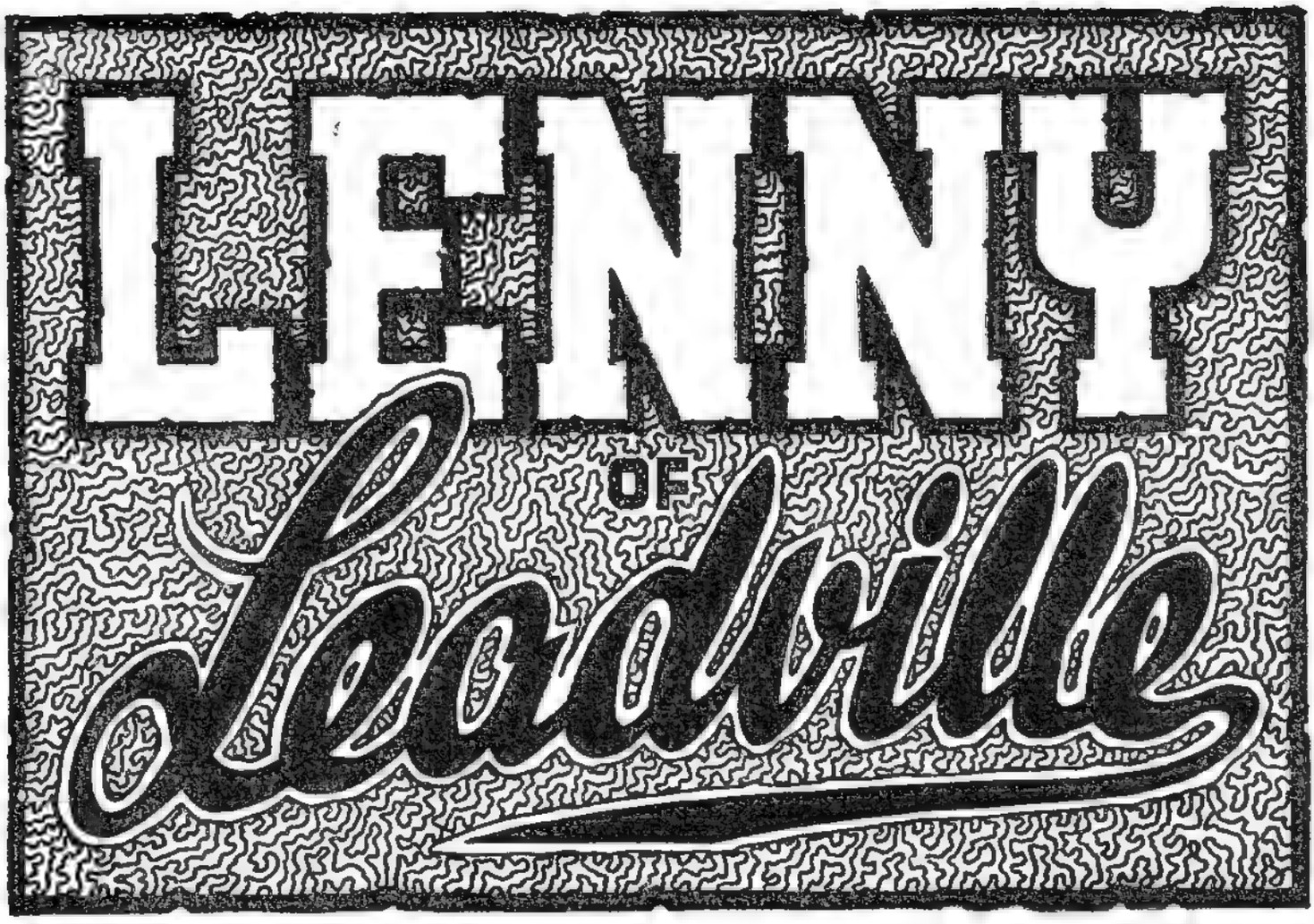
These hard-living lone wolves of the plains were collectors of scalps for the bounty money. The Indians usually made this a short-lived occupation.

SUCH A MAN WAS KIT CARSON.

THE KNIFE FIGHTER

The "Arkansas Toothpick" was the favourite weapon in the handkerchief-gripping "Missouri Duel." These knife-wielders were the terror of the West before the arrival of the Colt Sixshooter.

SUCH A MAN WAS JIM BOWIE.



"HOW much longer have we got?"

Heading east across Colorado, Dick Barrington put spurs to his pony and caught up with Gordon to ask his question.

"Eh?" Gordon Gregory looked at the leader of the three boys without actually seeing him. "What did you say?"

Dick repeated the question. The other came back to earth, as it were, and apologised. "Sorry, Dick," he said, "but I was thinking about something else. I guess you've got another week, maybe a little longer. I reckon to camp around Leadville to-night and then head north for the Union Pacific where you fellows can hop an eastbound express. You realise, of course, that this time you'll have to go back to England the usual way, the way you came. Savvy?"

It was Tom Hall who answered. "Sure," he drawled in the language of the West he used whenever possible. "We get you, Gordon, but why the worried brow?"

All four were riding at an easy canter towards a distant range of mountains and Gordon did not reply for several minutes. "I was thinking about somewhere to camp," he said at last. "I know we'll be O.K. in the foothills of the Wet Mountains yonder, but things are bothering me; there's trouble about or I never smelt it. Get up, there!" He spurred his mount and soon they were galloping along the twisty but fairly smooth trail. Behind Gordon, Dick bawled to Harry.

"I've never seen Gordon so bothered!" he yelled.

Harry nodded. "Same here!" he bawled back, but, after that, there was little opportunity for conversation. Gordon set too hot a pace and the quartet were in the midst of the foothills of the Wet Mountains as the sun began to sink towards the West.

"O.K." The cry came clearly from Gordon Gregory, and a moment or two later all four had dismounted at the entrance to a small canyon. "I guess we'll be all right here," commented the leader. "You'll be glad to know that I feel a heap better." He laughed as he flung down his bedroll. "I had one heck of a feeling that a fellow was tailing us, that he'd been tailing us for some time."

The three boys laughed. "Then he can't be doing it now," said Tom, "or you'd know. You're like an Indian, Gordon, and I reckon the fellow would have to be mighty smart to fool you. Gee!" he added gaily. "This is a swell spot." He gazed around happily. "It's hard to believe that this is the eighteen-sixties. I guess this place hasn't changed for a million years and won't change for another million. I say, Dick," the speaker went on, "did you think to bring——?" He broke off abruptly and was staring at Gordon Gregory. "Hey!" he bawled. "What's wrong?"

"Put 'em up, Mister!"

Gordon was certainly not talking to his friends. He had his back to them and his six-gun was levelled at a vague shadow that had materialised out of the gathering gloom. He spoke again. "Put 'em up, Lenny. We shan't hurt you if you come right forward with both arms above y'r head. Savvy?" The last word was accompanied by a metallic sound as Gordon spun the cylinders of his six-shooter, as a gentle reminder that he meant just what he said.

"Durned claim-jumpers," growled the man as he obeyed, "I'll get you yet!"

"Who is he?" asked Dick as Gordon bent forward and, with one swift movement, relieved the stranger of his six-gun. "You called him Lenny. Lenny who?"

"Jist Lenny!" snarled the man, bearded and with twin rows of broken, tobacco-stained teeth, as he glared at the three boys with bloodshot, hunted eyes. "Lenny of Leadville. You ain't foolin' me by pretending not to know me. You're Boss Mason's brats, ain't you?"

Gordon signalled to T., D. and H. to remain silent and to go on with preparing the little camp. Meanwhile, he and Lenny moved to one side and were soon deep in conversation, although the boys noted, as they worked with skilled and practised hands, that Gordon was keeping his gun pointing in the right direction. Presently, however, when the meal was almost ready and a moon was illuminating the scene, Dick Barrington saw that his strange friend had holstered his colt and was listening intently to what Lenny had to say, a Lenny who was taking great drags at a freshly rolled cigarette as if it was the first he had enjoyed for many a long day—which, indeed, proved to be a fact.

"Grub's ready, Gordon!" called out Harry Dalby at last.

Both the others rose at once and, during the satisfying meal of beefsteak, sourdough bread and baked beans with stewed dried fruit and scalding coffee to follow, Tom, Dick and Harry noticed that their guest ate ravenously even if he remained permanently on guard, shooting nervous glances behind him most of the time from those restlessly shifting bloodshot eyes. He said nothing during the meal but, having finished, he leaned back, took the makings from an ever-obliging Gordon, rolled himself a fresh smoke with the skill of the man who never sees a ready-made cigarette, and finally sighed contentedly.

"That was sure good!" he growled.

Gordon agreed, adding: "When you feel good and ready, Lenny, I think the fellows here"—he indicated Tom, Dick and Harry—"might kind of like to hear y'r story." He turned to the boys. "I've convinced Lenny," he explained, "that we're not claim-

HE SPOKE AGAIN." PUT 'EM UP LENNY, WE SHANT HURT YOU IF YOU COME RIGHT FORWARD WITH YOUR ARMS ABOVE YOUR HEAD. SAVVY?" . . . . . .

jumpers and that you're not Boss Mason's three uncouth offspring. I can tell you this much—that wasn't exactly a compliment, because Mason's boys are pretty durned tough."

"Hows about my six-gun?" put in Lenny.

By way of reply, Gordon passed over the gun, which the miner holstered and then patted his hip almost affectionately. It was as if he had felt only half clad without his gun and was now fully dressed once more.

"Thanks," he growled, took another deep drag at his smoke, allowed the blue haze to rise in the still air, sat watching it for a moment and then plunged into his story. Right from the start the boys sat like stone images but, towards the end, they began to shift nervously and to cast apprehensive glances around them, as if they expected other dark shadows to materialise into men like Lenny of Leadville.

"I've been prospecting hereabout for two years," said the miner, "but, up to three months ago, I had no luck. Sure, I found gold in small quantities and some silver in even smaller quantities, but I reckon what I got didn't pay for the upkeep of me and my burro. The fellows in Leadville ribbed me because I was so durned unlucky and I found it more than hard to get a grubstake from the storekeepers.

"However," went on the speaker, another cigarette between his bearded lips, "I managed to collect enough hard money to take a trip to the Wet Mountains without being beholden to any of them tight-fisted gents in Leadville. I wandered around for five weeks and was just thinking that I'd looked almost everywhere when a storm came out of the east like a ragin' demon. That was jist 'bout three months back."

"Yes?" said Gordon encouragingly, as the man paused.

"Waal," went on Lenny, "my burro and I struggled on 'til we came to a kinda cave hereabouts——" He waved a hand in a vague manner, at the same time shooting a suspicious glance at his new friends. "The durned storm blew itself out in a matter of three hours, but I decided to pitch camp in the cave and went right to the back out of reach of the biting wind that still whistled around. I'd hardly lighted a fire when I saw the silver, glistening in the rock. There were chunks of it, fellers, not jist quartz, but chunks. I reckoned it would assay at about a thousand bucks a ton, and that's durned good going for silver. Waal," went on Lenny, as he sucked in a mouthful of acrid smoke, "I guess I went loco for a spell. I jist stuffed my pockets and an old sack with as much rock and silver as I could carry, made a rough drawing of the location of the mine and left for Leadville at sun-up."

"Then what happened?" broke in Dick.

The miner looked at the boy. "I got back to town after dark and went to a pal I've got. We managed to get that ore assayed, secretly like, and it ran to eight hundred dollars a ton. Then we pulled out of town and hit the trail again. My pal was killed——" The speaker stopped and looked at Gordon.

"It was an accident," put in the other. "I believe Lenny's story. Another storm overtook them and his pal fell down a cliff and was buried under tons of rock. There was nothing Lenny could do."

"It's the truth," groaned the bearded man. "I swear it."

"O.K.," came Gordon Gregory's soothing reply. "We believe you, Lenny. Now get on with y'r yarn."

"Waal," continued the other, "I made straight for the Last Chance Mine and, jist at first, I thought I'd come the wrong way. Everything looked different to what my rough map told me things should look like." The speaker lowered his voice to a growl.

"....I'D HARDLY LIGHTED A FIRE WHEN I SAW THE SILVER....."

"Then I knew what had happened. That storm had set loose a landslide and I guess the Last Chance was covered with thousands of tons of rock. That rich mine was lost, jist as the Lost Soldier and the Lost Shovel of Wyoming, the Lost Adam's Diggings, the Lost Blue Bucket and a dozen others." The bearded face of the miner seemed to have sunk and misery stared out of those bloodshot eyes. "But I'll find it," he added excitedly as he scrambled to his feet and glared down at the boys. "I've got to find it. A guy can't go finding a rich mine like that and then lose it. It ain't right, it ain't just. Is it? *Is it?*"

"Steady!" cautioned Gordon. "Finish y'r story."

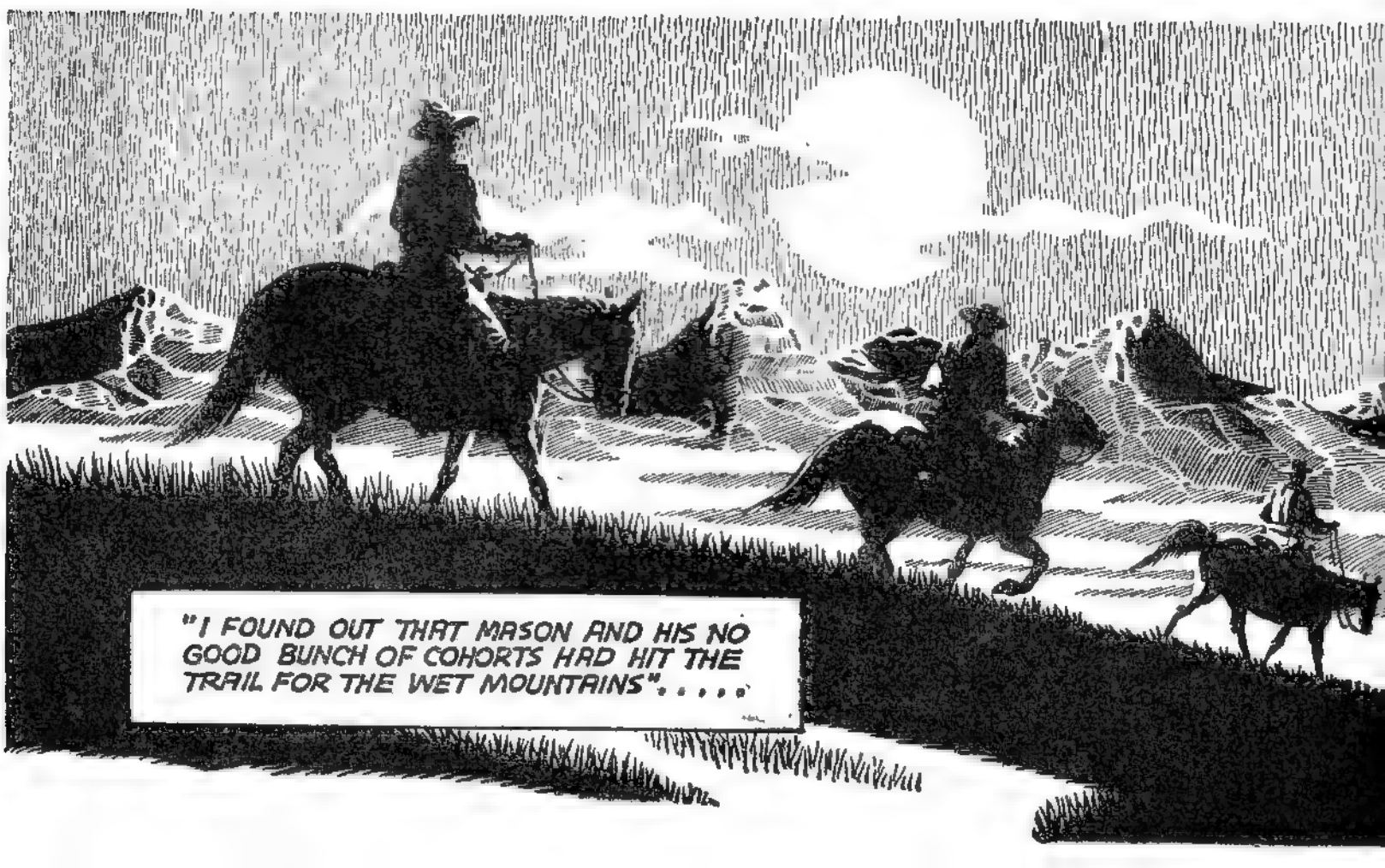
"O.K." Lenny rolled another cigarette with twitching fingers. "I'd stayed a matter of three weeks looking for a chance to get under that landslide when I made up my mind to get back to Leadville and tell my story. I made town in a few days and went straight to the sheriff's office, but he wasn't there." A pause and another drag at that cigarette. "Instead I found his deputy, Boss Mason, sittin' with his legs on the table cleaning his six-guns. He listened to what I had to say and, right in the middle of my story, he hollered for Jeff Peterson, who looks after the jail, and I found myself arrested for the murder of Bob Sturdy—that was the name of my pal."

Tom Hall whistled. "And then——?" he murmured.

"Then," went on the miner, "I found out that Mason and a bunch of his no-good cohorts had hit the trail for the Wet Mountains. You see, fellers, he reckoned that I was lying 'bout the Last Chance being hidden and reckoned, with the help of the map he took off me, to find it and jump my claim."

"What did you do?" This from Dick. "How is it you're here and not in jail?"

The man grinned craftily. "It wasn't hard to get out," he explained, "and about a



fortnight ago I bust open the window, climbed a ten-foot wall, stole a burro and left Leadville in one heck of a hurry. I've been looking for the Last Chance Mine, and for Mason and his pals ever since." Those bloodshot eyes peered at Tom, Dick and Harry. "I don't see as well as I did onc't," he finished, "and that's how I came to thinking that you fellers were Boss Mason's brats."

As the man finished speaking he lowered himself to the ground again, peered into the canvas tobacco-sack and began to roll yet another smoke.

"Well," said Gordon. "What do you think, fellows? Right now this guy Mason, his three sons and one or two others are roaming around these hills looking for Lenny's mine; meantime Lenny here is looking for the mine and the no-good hoodlum who happens to be deputy sheriff of Leadville. I figure we'd better hang around for a bit, don't you?" Before T., D. and H. could reply, Gordon shifted his gaze to Lenny. "O.K. by you?" he asked.

The miner nodded. "Suits me," he said, "but, see here, I'm not quittin' 'til I locate that mine. Not if it takes me years."

Gordon grinned and set to mending the fire so that it would glow warmly but give out a minimum of smoke.

"Take it easy, Lenny," he said. "We've plenty of time." He winked at his companions. "I guess we've got all the time there is. Eh, fellows?"

T., D. and H. acknowledged the joke with returning winks but, at the same time, their eyes were everywhere as they prepared to turn in. The moon had scaled the sky to its maximum height and was now half-concealed by drifting clouds; by the look of things a storm was blowing up from the east, and blowing up too rapidly for comfort.

Despite the ill luck that had dogged him, and the anxiety that must have burned

inside him, Lenny was asleep almost before he had rolled himself in his threadbare blanket. The other four remained awake for some time.

"What do you think, Gordon?" asked Dick.

Gordon Gregory looked grim. "First of all, there's another storm due pretty soon," he answered, "and secondly, I've an idea this fellow Mason and his pals aren't very far away. That poor fellow"—he nodded towards the sleeping Lenny—"thinks that Mason doesn't know he's in the vicinity but, although I can't be certain of it, I reckon Mason has been trailing him for some time. It's my guess that he arranged for him to escape from jail and kept on his trail."

Dick Barrington whistled softly and his hand went to the butt of his pearl-handled six-shooter. "That means we'll have to take spells at watching," he said presently. "I don't mind taking the first two hours. Then Tom and Harry can take an hour each. I know you don't sleep much, Gordon," he added, "but you look kind of done up and I reckon you could do with a few hours shut-eye, huh?"

The leader of the party nodded. "O.K.," he agreed. "You're getting to know me pretty well. Frankly I don't think there'll be an attack to-night, but it's best to be on the safe side. Fire a single shot if you see so much as a shadow, Dick. Don't try conclusions with anyone, yourself, as it might be very dangerous. Remember that Mason will think we are pals of Lenny's and therefore his enemies."

Dick Barrington nodded and, in a moment, Gordon was asleep, or as near sleep as he ever got. Tom Hall and Harry Dalby soon settled down and, as the wind increased and the moon was more and more obscured, the watcher sat draped in his blanket, with a rifle across his knees and his eyes trying to pierce the growing darkness. An hour went by and then half the second hour. A glance at Gordon Gregory told Dick that his strange friend must have been very weary: his face was parchment colour, the eyes mere slits and his limbs sprawling in an ungainly attitude.

Somewhere a coyote howled and a mountain owl hooted dismally and, all the time, the wind increased, and once or twice the watcher thought he detected a flurry of rain in the air that stung his cheeks like a handful of wet sand. Despite all this, Dick Barrington found himself dozing and, when the danger came, he was not as alert as he should have been. The shadow was upon him like a great bat and something hard and metallic was pressed against his ribs.

Crack!

Dick kicked out and his rifle spoke its warning. Tom and Harry and, a split second later, Lenny were roused to find the little camp surrounded by men, three of them hardly a year or so older than T., D. and H.

The miner looked bemused as a lantern was flashed in his face.

"I ain't tellin', Mason!" he almost sobbed. "I ain't tellin'."

"Dick——" Tom hissed into his friend's ear. "Where's Gordon?"

A shrug answered him. "We'll think about that later," he whispered back. "Right now we've got to protect Lenny." He was on his feet and faced Deputy Sheriff Boss Mason. "What's this all about, Mr. Mason?" he demanded. "How dare you come here threatening us?"

"Pipe down, kid," snapped the man, tapping the star on his shirt. "Reckon y've got y'rself mixed up in something pretty bad. This guy Lenny"—he waved a gun perilously close to the shrinking miner—"killed his pal after the poor devil had located a rich silver mine; then he blows into town with some crazy story about the mine getting covered up by a landslide. Waal," the speaker was prodding Lenny's chest with his

loaded six-gun, "the law reckons to make him tell where the mine is, then it'll hang him for killing when he had no business to kill. We're a law-abiding community in Leadville, boy, and we do things regular. See?"

"You fool!" burst out Lenny. "The Last Chance Mine belongs to me——"

Boss Mason glared into the bearded face. "Then you admit it's still there!" he roared.

"Of course it is"—in a high-pitched, squeaking kind of voice—"but, like I told you, there's twenty thousand tons of earth and rock atop of it. It's true, I tell you. It's true, as true as my story about poor Bob. He was killed like I said——"

"Stop him chattering, Boss!" drawled one of the men of the deputy sheriff's party. "Mayhap a rope around his neck will persuade him to take us to the mine. Y'r boys can look after the kids. O.K.?"

"Sure!" Mason grinned as he looked in the direction of his three sons. "Bring 'em along, boys! Reckon we'd better start before this storm gets really bad." He lifted his face to the sky. "Weather don't look too good."

Tom, Dick and Harry made some show of resistance as the Mason boys came towards them, but they were soon bound with their wrists tied behind their backs and, with guns prodding them from behind, were forced to take the trail. It was heavy going and all the time the wind increased in volume until it was almost impossible to make headway against it. Then it rained, rain that quickly changed to stinging sleet that slashed the cheeks and forced the members of the party to close their eyes every now and again. From the rear, however, Boss Mason and his cohorts shouted above the howling of the gale.

"Keep goin'," they boomed. "One wrong move"—came the deputy sheriff's voice —"and it'll be the last. How much farther is it, Lenny?" went on the speaker, a few

of his words being whisked away as he uttered them. "I'll give you another half an hour and then I'll plug you and take a chance on finding that mine. Hear that, kids?" A pause. "Better warn this whiskery pal of yours to head the right way."

"I'm not foolin' you, Mason!" shrilled Lenny. "It's not much farther and then—then you'll see that I was telling the truth."

Boss Mason swore, but after that outburst there was no further talking as the party struggled on until the narrow trail became no more than a ledge of rock round the sheer face of a towering cliff.

"It's round this shoulder of rock, Mason," came Lenny's almost hysterical cry, "but the wind's too strong. We'll never make it. Best to——"

"I'm giving the orders around here," interrupted the deputy sheriff. "Keep going."

"What about freeing our arms?" yelled Dick.

The man behind growled in his throat. "O.K., boys," he boomed to his sons. "Take them cords off, but keep y'r eyes skinned for trouble."

So the procession, now in single file, went forward again. Once Tom, who never did like heights, glanced downwards. He felt sick and was forced to turn his face to the rock wall, as his knees shook and the palms of his hands were clammy with sweat.

"Keep going!" came that ruthless order.

Slowly that narrow trail was negotiated until it began to widen a little and, even in that bad light, Dick in the van was able to see the location of the Last Chance. One glance told him that Lenny had been right, for there was the result of that landslide that had smoothed away the ledges of quartz to one huge steep slope.

"You see!" howled Lenny. "There it is, and there ain't no way under. I've tried to find a way, Mason, and there isn't one. Sure, there's a million in silver, maybe ten million, right there where y'r looking, but it might jist as well be a thousand, ten thousand miles away. The earth gave it to me, Boss Mason, but I guess it took it away again. See here," he went on, his voice one persistent shriek, "I'll give you a half-share, how's that? We'll get a hundred men up here and we'll spend six months digging and dredging. How's that, Mason? We'll be killed if we stay here now."

There was a pause, the while the wind plucked at the flapping garments of those fly-like men against that black wall of rock.

Then: "Keep going, I said."

It was only a mutter at first, as if of thunder, but in the space of seconds it had grown to a roar. The widening ledge under the feet of Tom, Dick and Harry seemed to tremble, as if a giant was rocking the earth as a mischievous child rocks a table.

Rumble-rumble-rooaaaaar!

The landslide came thundering down the hillside like an express train and Tom Hall found Dick's arms about his waist and his friend yelling like a fiend in his ear. *"Don't move, Tom. Don't move. Keep your head down."*

Those seconds that followed were filled with noise and blows, with the feeling that the sky had collapsed and was pressing down upon the three adventurers in the Wild West of the latter half of the nineteenth century. Once, in the midst of that roaring, rumbling, crashing sound, as thousands of tons of earth and rock plunged downwards, they thought they heard a scream, but in all that horrible confusion it was impossible to be sure of anything—anything except the fact that, when the noise subsided a little, they were still there crouching on that ledge, smothered from head to foot in dust and mud, blinded for the moment and even their nostrils clogged.

"You fellows all right?"

The voice was Gordon's and there was the strange fellow holding out a hand to Tom Hall. "It's all over now, Tom," he said cheerfully, "and I think we'll have no further trouble from Boss Mason and the rest. No!" he added quickly, as he saw Tom's head move. "Don't look. Like Lenny's pal, there's nothing we can do for them. That landslide plucked them off that ledge like limpets by an angry sea."

The three boys made no reply but edged their way along the rest of that ledge, stepping over large stones, little piles of soil and even huge rocks. Behind them, on hands and knees, came Lenny of Leadville, ghostly white but as whole as they were —a slight gash across one cheek being the only sign of injury. There was a twisted smile of triumph on his lips, the smile of the naturally kindly man who is fighting against a sense of exaltation at seeing his ruthless enemies receive the punishment they so richly deserved.

Suddenly Lenny yelled. This was no ordinary yell of terror but one of amazement and joy. He stood upright on his feet in their broken, cracked boots and his arms were raised to the dripping sky.

"The Mine!" he yelled. "Goldurn it, fellers, thar's the *Last Chance Mine. Mine! Mine!"*

Dick rubbed his eyes and looked. It was true. Where the first landslide had covered up that fabulously rich silver mine, the second had swept away the thousands of tons of earth and rock to leave the terrain much as it had been. Then the boy was almost knocked off his feet as Lenny of Leadville pushed by him and ran, like an aged and rather desolate scarecrow, towards the mine that was to transform him into a rich man, a man with a house like a palace, carriages, a wife smothered in furs, power beyond his wildest dreams and, above all, security for the rest of his life.

"Steady, Lenny!" called out Gordon. "Steady, man!"

But there was no calling the miner back.

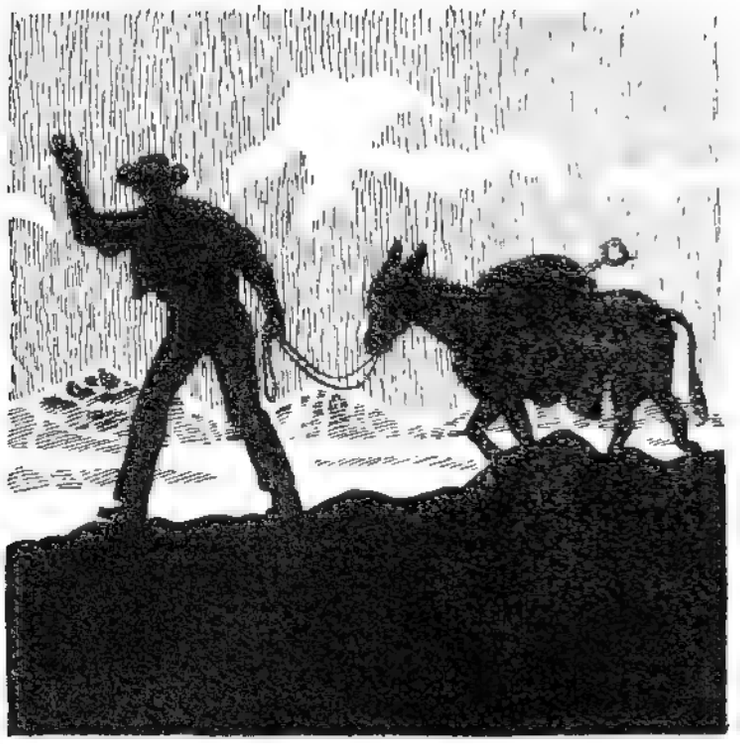
"Let him go, fellows," said Gordon, as they reached some kind of shelter and took stock of themselves. "He'll be all right. No one is likely to worry about his argument with the unfortunate Boss Mason when he gets back with his story and another pocketful of specimens assaying nearly a thousand dollars to the ton; he'll sell out the Last Chance for more money than even he can spend in a lifetime and, if my guess is right, there'll be many times when he'll wish he'd kept to the trail with hope to sit by his side and comfort him. Riches aren't everything, chaps, as I've told you many times before."

T., D. and H. nodded. This had been the first time they had actually seen a human being dazed by a vast fortune thrust into his lap, and the sight had upset them. Thus they were more than ready to take Gordon Gregory's hand, to form a chain and allow their strange guide to lift them out of that period of time and to whisk them away from the dreaded Wet Mountains of Colorado.

Just before Gordon's strange brand of magic began to work, however, they caught a final glimpse of the figure of Lenny of Leadville. He was standing stock still as the howling gale finally subsided and the remnants of the night's silver lamp in the sky threw a glittering light full on to him. It seemed, indeed, that he was clothed in silver. Then the man they had helped to overcome his enemies vanished round a bend in the trail and Gordon's steady voice reached their ears.

"Ready, chaps?" he asked. "Let's go!"

Once more the earth rocked, there was a roaring in their ears and darkness came down like a thick, enveloping velvet curtain.



SILVER Prince

"AAAH!"

Dick Barrington sighed happily as he stretched on the soft springy earth, rolled over and buried his face in the lush Wyoming grass.

"Like it?" asked Gordon.

Dick sat up and grinned his approval. "This is the best camp we've had since we first came to the West. What do you say, chaps?"

Tom and Harry agreed. They looked across the valley, green with the richness of spring, and yellow, red and blue with wild flowers. Tough as the three boys had become since they had first enjoyed these wonderful adventures in the Wild and Woolly West, they were still able to enjoy the softness of that land of lush grass and rolling prairie land. Now all three boys sat, knees drawn up, looking towards the hills that almost surrounded the spot where Gordon had chosen to camp for a much-needed rest.

"It's as well we came here, fellows," went on Gordon. "We've had a couple of mighty tough adventures and, frankly, I was beginning to lose my grip of things. However, I haven't brought you here for no purpose; it's true that we're heading for the Union Pacific railroad for you to hop an eastbound train, but that isn't all."

"Well?" demanded the three in chorus.

"I've got a friend in——" Gordon broke off and grinned. "Them thar hills!" he finished with a chuckle.

"What kind of friend?" demanded Tom. "You've got some pretty queer friends, Gordon."

"You'll see," came the cryptic reply. "We start at sun-up and ride due north. It's only a matter of two hours' ride and Bill Wilson should be here any minute."

"Bill——?" began Harry.

"Ah!" Gordon was on his feet. "If I'm not mistaken, here he comes now." And, as the others followed their friend's pointing finger, they saw a horseman coming through a grove of cottonwood trees. He rode at an easy canter and T., D. and H. were barely able to get to their feet before a short, bow-legged man with blue jeans tucked into tooled-leather boots, leather chaps, a vivid blue-checked shirt, a russet-red scarf and a huge ten-gallon hat had ridden up, dismounted and was greeting Gordon as most people did—like a long-lost brother.

"I'm sure glad to see you again, feller!" he drawled, bridle over one arm. "Howdy, boys!" He saluted the three fellows from Colden College. "I'm sure lookin' forward to roundin' up Silver Prince."

Tom, Dick and Harry stared as the speaker walked his pony towards a patch of grazing and, as one, turned towards Gordon. "You're like a clam," complained Harry. "When will you tell us what's going on? You're always keeping us in the goldurned dark."

"Sorry, Dick," came the reply, "but I wanted it to be a surprise. It just happens that the friend I was talking about a little while ago is a four-footed one. He's a magnificent grey stallion that roams those hills. As a matter of fact the folk around here call the hills the Silver Slopes because of Silver Prince. Plenty of people have tried to trap that stallion, Bill Wilson among them, but so far they haven't succeeded. He's a wily old fellow, I can tell you."

"Y'r right thar, Gordon," came the horse-wrangler's voice, "but this time, with your help, I reckon I'll be a mite luckier." The speaker squatted down, cowboy fashion, with one leg acting as a kind of footstool, and began to talk about the stallion. From what he said the boys gathered that Silver Prince had a string of mares, with their sons and daughters, following him; that the creature had defied well-organised attempts to capture him and, although once in a while men made raids on the grey's train and managed to rope a dozen or so colts and foals, they had never contrived to get within roping distance of Silver Prince. "But I guess that's all over now," finished Bill Wilson, as he gulped down piping-hot coffee. "We'll get him to-morrow, sure 'nough! I figger on ridin' him into town a week from to-day. Them guys who perch like crows along the rails oppo-site the Sun Hotel 'ull sure get one heck of a surprise."

Gordon grinned. "Don't be too sure, Bill," he put in. "Silver Prince isn't an ordinary horse."

"I ain't no ord'nary guy!" came the reply. "And, what's more, you ain't either."

Everyone laughed at that and, half an hour later, that peaceful camp, far from any kind of trouble, was silent and restful with all those who used it sleeping soundly, even a gently smiling Gordon Gregory.

They were away at sun-up, gulping down the inevitable coffee that T., D. and H. so often wished they could get at home but which seemed to be peculiar to the Western States of America, and rode for nearly two hours until the Silver Slopes surrounded

them with their spring beauty. It must have been half an hour afterwards that Bill Wilson, ranging ahead, came galloping back with a grey mare tossing her head at the end of his lariat.

"Lookee here!" bawled the excited horse-wrangler. "Ain't that a swell mare?" He slid from the saddle and, as Gordon quickly dismounted and held his own and Bill Wilson's mount, approached the wild creature and soothed her at a single touch. The boys watched in amazement and all thoughts they might have had against the wisdom of helping this man to trap the wild stallion vanished at the sight of his gentleness. What horse, they argued in their minds, could fail to be happy with such a lover of animals as its master?

"Turn her loose, Bill!"

Gordon's order startled everyone.

"But——" began Tom.

Gordon looked at him. "Thought you'd see, Tom," he said, "what's behind my idea. That mare's bound to lead us straight to Silver Prince. By the look of her she's been straying some time, and that means she'll be mighty anxious to rejoin the herd. Go ahead, Bill, let her go. We'll pretend to ride back the way we've come. I guess Silver Prince wouldn't be fooled by such a ruse, but that mare isn't Silver Prince."

"Sure!" The horse-wrangler nodded, loosed the rope from the creature's neck, stepped back and watched her hesitate for a moment or two and then head south-east. The four riders remounted, turned the heads of their ponies and cantered away. They rode steadily for a matter of half a mile before Gordon wheeled about and called over his shoulder.

"O.K.," he shouted. "Keep well behind me."

With the thunder of hoofs on the firm earth the little cavalcade swept round a huge nature-carved mound of rock like a great cathedral, put their mounts to a gentle slope, gained the top, turned south-east and galloped almost silently along a trail that was lush with the grass that is such a feature of Wyoming. For an hour they saw no sign of their quarry and Tom Hall was beginning to mutter to himself, in a queer way he had, when he saw Gordon's hand raised.

Bill Wilson, riding almost at the leader's flank, was out of the saddle in a moment and running, in a queer, crab-like manner, to a large, dome-shaped rock. By the time Tom, Dick and Harry reached Gordon, the horse-wrangler was signalling to them to join him. With excitement increasing their heartbeats the boys ground-hitched their mounts and hurried towards the rock on foot.

"Yep!" Bill said, when he had been joined by his companions. "That's nearly the whole herd." He pointed to a number of horses, many silver-grey in colour, grazing close to a sort of amphitheatre of rocks. "Point is, however, that the old rascal himself ain't thar. What do you make of it, Gordon? You don't think——" Anxiety creased the speaker's forehead. "He ain't daid, huh?"

"No!" Gordon shook his head. "I don't think so. It *is* odd, though, that he ain't there. Listen——" He detailed his plan of action. It was simplicity itself, merely that they should split up into two unequal parties, he and Bill Wilson riding one way and Tom, Dick and Harry the other. "When the herd comes this way to gain the valley," said Gordon to his three friends, "you must head them back. That way we'll be able to corral them in that gully yonder or, at any rate, most of them. We'll look for Silver Prince and deal with him. O.K.?"

T., D. and H. nodded.

A minute or two later they were off and within twenty minutes all Gordon's plans seemed to be worthless. The herd milled restlessly and some headed away, but the main body stayed more or less where they were. Tom, Dick and Harry lost sight of Gordon and Bill, but suddenly there came a shrill whistle.

"Come on," yelled Dick. "That's Gordon. This way!" And giving his pony its head he thundered away.

They burst into a clearing sweet with green grass and a spring, and the sight that met their gaze was, perhaps, the last thing they had expected. Silver Prince was there all right, and a dozen other young stallions and a few mares with him, but he did not move and it was Harry who first saw that he stood on three legs.

"*Keep back!*" came Gordon's cry. "Leave this to Bill."

The boys dismounted and watched and marvelled. It was something they were never likely to see again. Bill Wilson had slipped from the saddle of his own grey and was advancing towards the stationary stallion—and what a stallion; proud and with a long, flowing tail that waved like pampas grass in the faint, scented breeze that blew across the clearing. The horse watched the man's approach almost dispassionately and it was only when the horse-wrangler reached the creature's side that Silver Prince gave tongue. His cry was savage and shrill and the effect was instantaneous. The nearby stallions closed in.

"*Drive 'em off, fellows!*" yelled Gordon.

What happened after that seemed like a dream. Calling shrilly, the loyal courtiers of that monarch of the wild were forced to scatter; again and again they attempted to rejoin their leader, but the boys and Gordon were too many for them.

Then came Bill Wilson's call. "O.K., Gordon," he shouted. "He's quiet enough."

Then Tom, Dick and Harry were able to rest and to see that the little bow-legged horse-wrangler was busy binding the hind nearside leg of the stallion and, as they came closer, could hear the man talking.

"Steady, old fellow," he was saying. "Reckon that leg needs attention, huh? Reckon you'll be O.K. in the end, boy, but it'll take time." The speaker finished his task, stepped back and grinned at the stallion. "Now I reckon you'll be best on y'r own, eh?" he said. "I'll be back in three days, maybe, jist to see how y'r shapin'." He backed to where the boys and Gordon were standing. "Let's go!" he said.

No one argued. They just remounted and rode away.

"What will you do, Bill?" asked Dick, who was the first to break the silence.

"Do?" came the reply. "Nothing, I guess. I reckon Silver Prince will be right here when I get back and I guess he'll stay 'til I've helped mend that broken leg. Then——"

"Yes?" eagerly from Tom.

"Then I reckon he'll be off," finished the man who, as T., D. and H. guessed, loved horses better than he did humans. "And what's more, I'll see that there ain't no more posses sent out to round up that thar critter. No, sir!" The speaker turned and grinned broadly at the others. "Hows about making camp, fellers?" he drawled. "Reckon we'll just take things easy for a spell, huh?"

THE LONG HUNTER

This tough, sinewy breed of the early West ranged the wilderness for long periods in their search for fur-bearing animals through which they made their livelihood.

SUCH A MAN WAS DANIEL BOONE.

THE ROAD AGENT

Well armed and fast mounted, these sweepings of the Continent were the scourge of the waggon and stagecoach trails before the arrival of organized law enforcement.

SUCH A MAN WAS CHARLIE BENT.

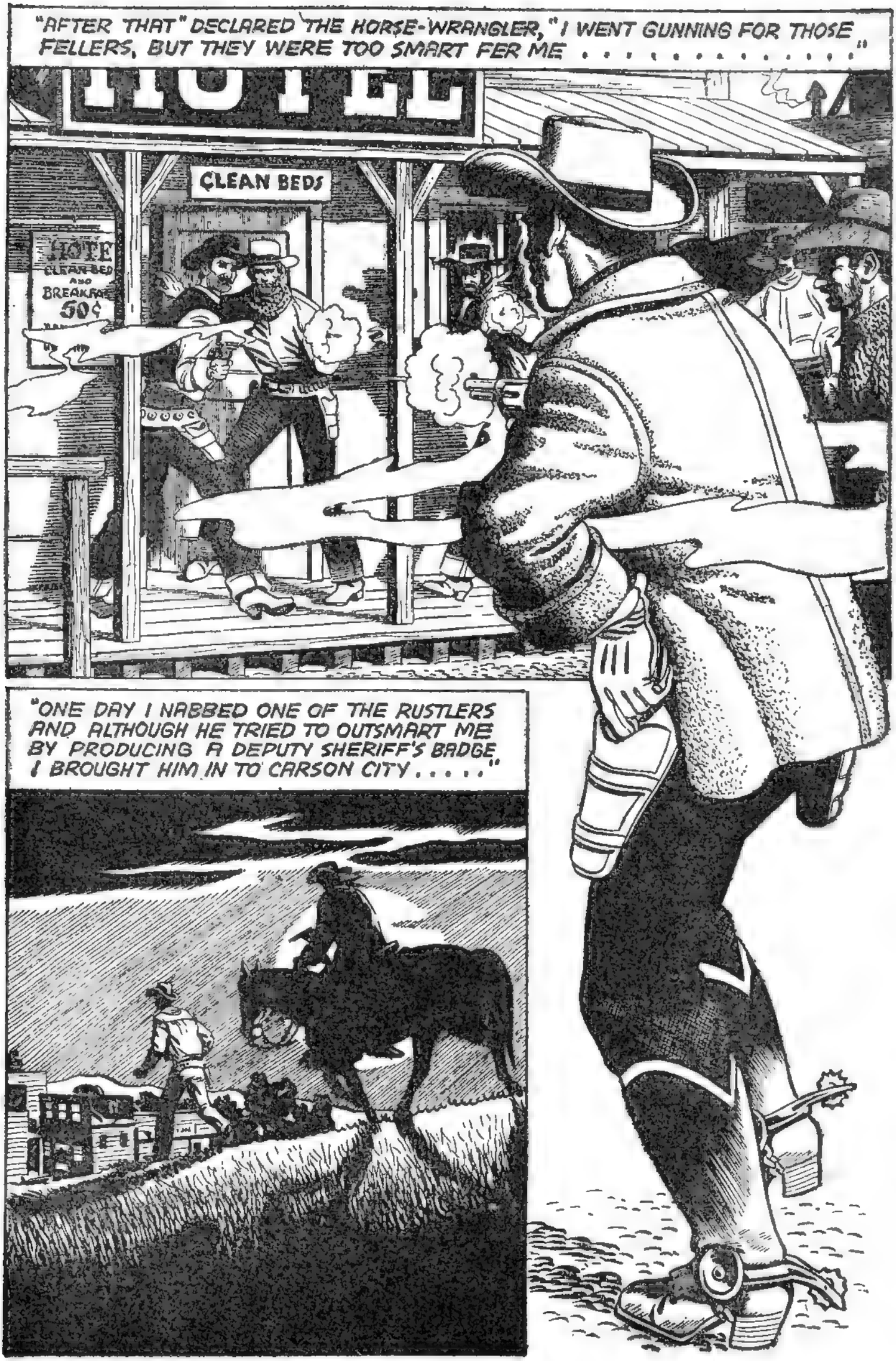
The SADDLE

JUST BEFORE BILL WILSON RODE AWAY HE HAPPENED TO BE FIXING HIS MAGNIFICIENT SILVER MOUNTED SADDLE. AS TOM, DICK AND HARRY ADMIRED IT HE TOLD THEM THE STORY OF HOW THE SADDLE ONCE SAVED HIS LIFE . . . . . .

"WAAL" DRAWLED BILL WILSON." I WAS A VERY YOUNG MAN WHEN A GUY NAMED SPARKS MADE IT FOR ME, ON ACCOUNT OF MY DOING HIM A GOOD TURN . . . ."

"SOME FELLERS GAVE ME QUITE A SEND OFF WHEN I LEFT TOWN" WENT ON BILL "BUT THAT SADDLE WAS BUILT TO STICK TO; UNLIKE SADDLES MADE IN YURRUP 'COS THERE A SADDLE'S LIGHT AND MADE SO THAT A GUY CAN FALL EASY LIKE . . . ."

"FOR SOME YERRS I KINDA LIVED IN THAT SADDLE WHEN I WAS PUNCHIN' CATTLE FOR OLD MAN CORNSTERD... BUMBLE HEAD CORNSTERD THEY CALLED HIM. IT NEVER LET ME DOWN. . . . . "
"THINGS GOT TOUGH ON THE DOUBLE X" WENT ON THE STORYTELLER, "AND THAR WAS SOME PRETTY TOUGH GUNMEN RUSTLING OUR CATTLE. ONE DAY I WENT AFTER THESE HOODLUMS . . . . . .
. . . . BUT A LUCKY SHOT PLOUGHED ACROSS MY SADDLE AND THEY GOT AWAY WHILE I WAS FIGHTING MY BRONC . . . . . .


"AFTER THAT" DECLARED THE HORSE-WRANGLER, "I WENT GUNNING FOR THOSE FELLERS, BUT THEY WERE TOO SMART FER ME . . . . . "
HOTEL
CLEAN BEDS
HOTE
CLEAN BED
AND
BREAKFAST
50¢
"ONE DAY I NABBED ONE OF THE RUSTLERS AND ALTHOUGH HE TRIED TO OUTSMART ME BY PRODUCING A DEPUTY SHERIFF'S BADGE I BROUGHT HIM IN TO CARSON CITY . . . . . "

"I DIDN'T FEEL SO GOOD AS I WENT INTO THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE" SAID BILL "AND WHEN I GOT INSIDE THEY PULLED GUNS ON ME AN' ARRESTED ME AS THE LEADER OF THE RUSTLERS"
"THEY'D GOT A PILE OF FAKE EVIDENCE AGAINST ME" WENT ON BILL WILSON "AND THINGS LOOKED MIGHTY BAD. THE SHERIFF AND HIS DEPUTIES WERE AS CROOKED AS CORKSCREWS. I SEEMED ALL SET FER THE NOOSE . . . . . "
HERE'S THE GUY'S SADDLE JUDGE!
THE MARK OF THE BULLET'S ON IT JUDGE WHERE WE SHOT AT HIM THREE YEARS AGO!
"THEY'D GOT ONE BIT OF EVIDENCE THAT SHOULD HAVE FIXED ME FOR GOOD"

IS THIS YOURN, WILSON?
SURE, HAD IT FOR YEARS BUT...
JURY
"WAAL" SAID BILL, "THEM GUYS COULDN'T FIND A MARK ON THIS SADDLE O' MINE SO OF COURSE I WAS RELEASED AT ONCE AND CHEERED BY HALF THE TOWN . . . . . "
THERE AIN'T A MARK ON THIS GUY'S SADDLE SHERIFF!
BUT...
Y'SEE FELLERS A WESTERNER DOESN'T LIKE RIDIN' A DAMAGED SADDLE AN' I'D REPAIRED THAT HOLE SO'S YOU COULDN'T TELL. TAKE A LOOKSEE, THAT'S WHERE I FIXED IT. NOT BAD EH? ANYHOWS, A SHORT TIME LATER WE GOT THEM RUSTLERS, BUT IT WAS A TOUGH JOB . . . . . !

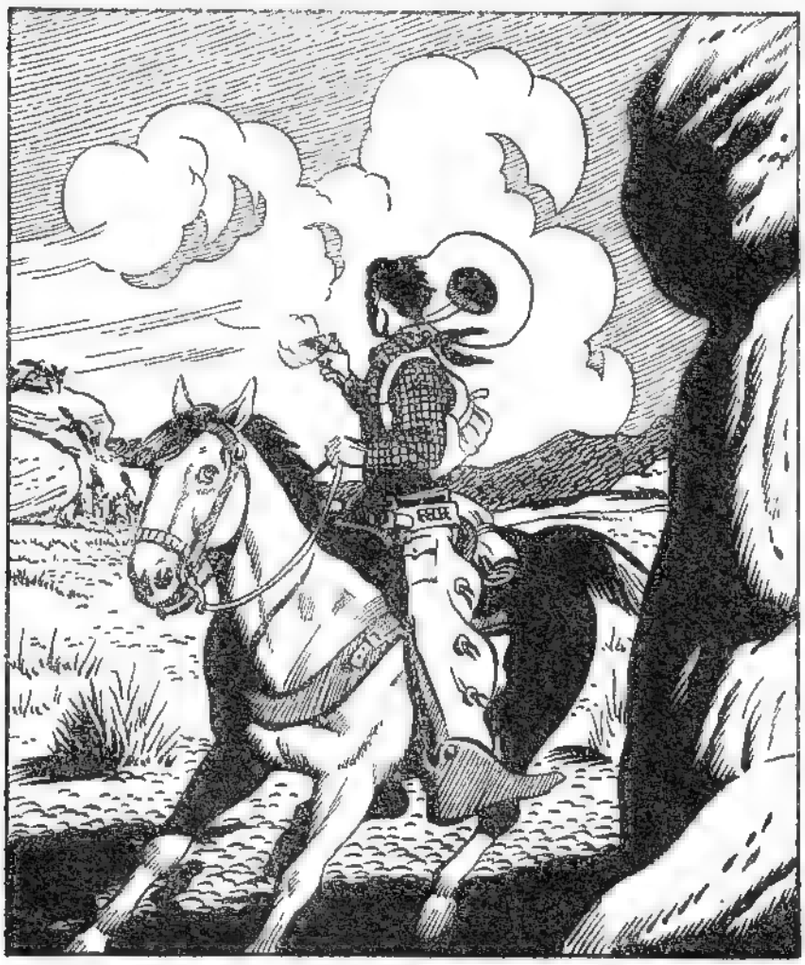
The Coyote
HEAR THAT COYOTE FELLERS? WHAT DOES IT REMIND YOU OF?
A COWBOY YELL!
CLOSE TO THE RAILROAD STOP-OFF BUFFALO BILL JOINED THE FOUR ADVENTURERS AND AS THE COYOTES WERE PARTICULARLY NOISY, THE PARTY SAT UP LATE YARNING....
CORRECT DICK!. THE FAMILIAR COWBOY YELL IS REALLY AN IMITATION OF THE COYOTE'S WEIRD CRY. I ONCE ATTENDED A BIG RANCH JAMBOREE AND SOMEONE YELLED FOR A COWBOY'S CALL. BELIEVE ME THE RESULT WAS REALLY DEAFENING.
YIP-YIP-YEOW!
YIP-YIP-YEOOOW!
YIP-YIP YE-OWWW!
YIP-YIP..!

BUFFALO BILL BLAZES AWAY WITH HIS SIXGUN AT ONE OF THE HOWLING BLACK SHAPES...

"THEY'RE HARD TO SHOOT TOO!" SAID BUFFALO BILL. "AND I WAS VERY LUCKY TO KILL A FINE SPECIMEN WITH MY SIXGUN ON ONE OCCASION."

FELLERS PRONOUNCE THE NAME IN DIFFERENT WAYS. WAY DOWN SOUTH IT'S 'KY-UT,' OR 'KY-OT' OR EVEN 'COY-OT.' WHILE IN THE NORTH HOWEVER, IT'S 'COY-OTEH' OR IN SOME PLACES 'KY-OTEH'!

"ONCE" SAID BILL CODY "I DID HEAR OF A LONE RIDER BEING TAILED BY A LARGE PACK OF COYOTES. THEY MUST HAVE BEEN RAVENOUS."

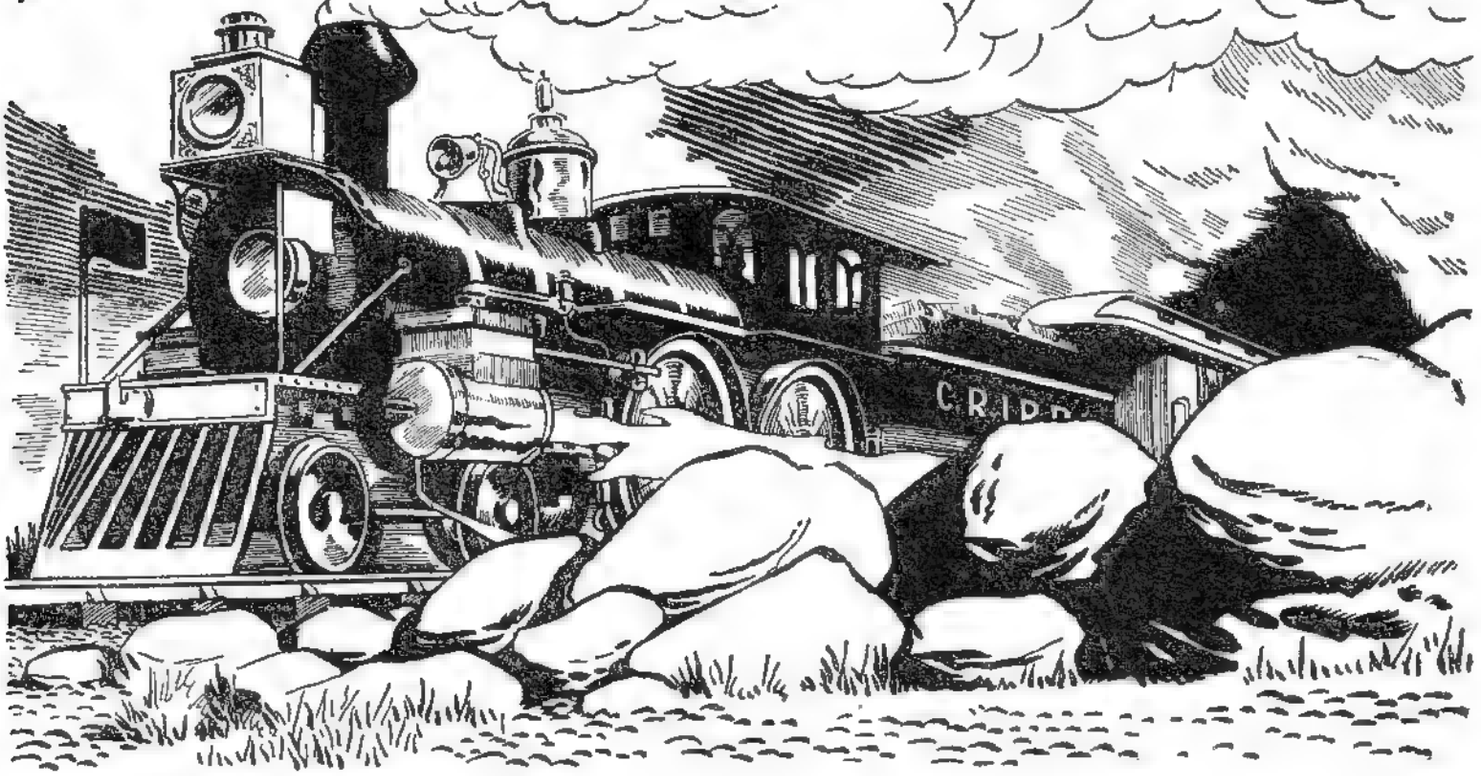


"THEY'RE LAZY CREATURES, AND VERY CUNNING" PUT IN GORDON. "MOSTLY THEY'LL DRIVE THEIR PREY CLOSE TO THEIR DENS SO AS TO SAVE THEM THE TROUBLE OF CARRYING THE FOOD THEY CATCH." "THEY SEEM TO BE AS BAD AS THEY SOUND!" SAID DICK AND BUFFALO BILL CERTAINLY AGREED WITH HIM IN THIS SENTIMENT . . . . . .

"ROVING INDIANS HATE THEM BECAUSE THEY SNATCH UP ANYTHING LYING AROUND," SAID GORDON. BILL YAWNED, "RECKON THEY'RE NOT WORTH TALKING ABOUT," HE SAID. "THEY'RE THIEVES, COWARDS AND YET VERY CRUEL TO SMALLER CREATURES!"

I GUESS WE'LL MAKE AN EARLY START IN THE MORNING. GOOD-NIGHT FELLERS!
SLEEP WELL AN' DON'T LET THE COYOTES KEEP YOU AWAKE!
WE WON'T!

The End of the Trail



TOM, Dick and Harry were very quiet when they left camp and rode at an easy lope in the direction of the Union Pacific railroad. Buffalo Bill was very talkative, however, and kept up a continuous flow of yarns. Suddenly, however, he broke off and reined in his horse.

"What's up?" asked Harry.

Bill Cody pulled his pointed beard. "I guess it's time we hit diff'rent trails, fellows," he said. "I'm travelling due west." He held out a hand to Dick Barrington. "S'long, Dick," he drawled. "I guess I'll be seein' you."

"I hope so!" came the enthusiastic reply. "We haven't seen so much of you this trip, Bill, but I guess there will be others, eh, Gordon?" And the speaker shot an enquiring glance in his strange friend's direction.

"Sure!" promised Gordon as he, too, said farewell to the great scout, Indian fighter, plainsman and showman. "They'll be coming West again, Colonel, and I reckon we'll be on the trail once more. S'long!"

A few moments later the quartet watched the upright figure of Buffalo Bill, with a last wave of an upraised gloved hand, ride down a cross trail until horse and rider finally vanished from sight round a bend.

"O.K.," said Gordon. "Let's go. Reckon trains won't wait, even for Gordon Gregory." And the four ponies were given their heads as the party galloped over the springy grassland of Wyoming. It was a hard ride, but a matter of three hours later the railroad track came into view, sweeping round a wide curve and then stretching endlessly into the distance. "Well," commented the leader, as he slowed his mount to an easy canter. "There it is, chaps, almost the end of the trail."

"Where's the depot?" asked Dick.

Gordon twisted in the saddle and grinned. "It isn't exactly a depot, Dick," he remarked; "just a stop-off where the express pulls up if there's any reason for doing so. Reckon we'll need to signal the engineer with a scarf."

Tom had a sudden idea. "Say, Gordon," he called out. "What period of history are we in?" He looked around him at the rolling prairie. "This might fit any historical frame. Things don't change much away from a town, do they?"

"He's not paying any attention, Tom," called out Harry. "Hey! We'd better get a move on. Gordon looks miles ahead and it would be like him to vanish in a puff of blue smoke. *Gosh!*" He let out a yell. "Here comes the durned train."

It was true. In the far distance rose a plume of black smoke and, as the boys rode at full gallop and the train rattled along the track, Tom's question was answered. That locomotive, with its train of cars, was certainly not modern and at a fourth glance Dick Barrington placed it as an 1880 model—or thereabout.

"Whoopee!" he yelled excitedly. "We're still in the Wild West. Hey, Gordon, don't ride so goldurned fast."

Less than ten minutes later, with the approaching express rounding the last curve, the four fellows stood by the railroad track and Harry Dalby was waving a scarlet scarf over his head.

"What happened to the ponies?" asked Tom.

"Need you ask?" came Dick's reply. Then the speaker looked questioningly at Gordon. "What about saying good-bye, Gordon?" he asked. "We haven't got much time and—— Yippeee!" He let out the wildest cowboy yell he had ever managed. "You're going with us, huh?"

"Sure!" Gordon nodded. "Leastways, part of the way. I—I——" he hesitated. "Tell you later," he finished, "the engineer has seen us. Ah, it's Jake Meeson. Howdy, Jake?" he bawled, as the puffing locomotive, with its jangling old-fashioned bell, passed them and the train slowed down before pulling up.

"Howdy, Gordon," shouted back the begrimed engineer. "Hop a car, lads. There's plenty of room in Number three."

"O.K." Gordon waved a hand and two minutes later the four were cosily ensconced in No. 3 car; the train stayed for a few minutes to take on water and then restarted with much fruitless wheel-spinning and a great deal of snorting and hissing. Compared with the modern train in which the boys had travelled to Coyote Creek, Nevada, goodness knows how long before, this was primitive in the extreme.

The other passengers in the car didn't seem to think so, however, and lolled at their ease on the plush, dust-collecting seats. The four newcomers found an empty "bay" but, as soon as they were seated, T., D. and H. noticed that there was something odd about Gordon.

"Spill it?" whispered Dick. "Don't keep us in the dark this time."

Gordon Gregory looked at the other fellow with unseeing eyes for a moment; then he shrugged his shoulders. "May as well," he said at last. "You'll get it out of me sooner or later and we haven't got a lot of time. I may be wrong, but I rather fancy Loco Larson has designs on this train."

"Loco——?" began Harry, but Gordon brought a gasp to the other's lips as he hacked his shin.

"Quiet!" he hissed. "See the guy just across the aisle? Fellow with the fancy waistcoat and gold watch-chain."

WITH A LAST WAVE OF HIS HAND BUFFALO BILL RODE DOWN A CROSS TRAIL UNTIL HORSE AND ITS RIDER FINALLY VANISHED.....

"Sure!"

"Well, keep y'r eyes on him, fellows," continued Gordon. "Last time I saw him I was at the wrong end of a six-shooter and his trigger-finger was somewhat itchy. He's a buddy of Frank Larson, whose speciality is holding up express trains on this particular line." Gordon's voice was almost inaudible, but his friends strained their ears to catch the words. "The trouble is that I figured Loco Larson was in Conspecke County Jail, Colorado, but I must be quite wrong. However——" He shrugged again. "How about a few card tricks?" A deck of cards were in the speaker's hands and he was fanning them so that Harry Dalby could choose a card.

Trick followed trick, all with Gordon's usual brilliance when it came to the manipulation of a deck of cards, and, somehow, they were all to blame in not keeping watchful eyes on the man in the swallow-tailed coat, the fancy waistcoat and the black sombrero tipped back off a broad, sun-tanned forehead.

No one saw him move a hand to his hip.

"Attention, everyone!" he shrilled above the clatter of the train.

All heads were lifted and a woman screamed as she saw the two pearl-handled six-guns balanced in the man's shapely hands, the hands of a card-sharper if anyone ever saw such a pair.

"No one is likely to get hurt," went on the man, "if you all act sensible-like. In just about half a minute this train is due to be held up by Loco Larson——"

"He's in jail!" boomed a voice.

A six-gun swung in an arc. "He was in jail, Mister!" corrected that ice-cold but stringent voice. "Right now, however, he's with six other guys . . . Ah!" At that moment the bell on the locomotive clanged warningly, there was a hiss of steam, a sharp application of brakes, a terrific jolting and the train pulled up. "I guess that'll be Loco!" came the bandit's voice. "As I was about to say . . ."

"You're not saying anything else!" shouted the booming voice that had called out before.

Crash!

A six-shooter thundered out its message, to be instantly followed by two spurts of flame from the bandit's gun, a howl of mingled pain and fright from he of the booming voice and then a voice from outside: "In trouble, Slick?" it roared. "We ain't got much time for fancy gunplay. Get busy."

"It's O.K. now, Loco," called back the man addressed as Slick. "Just some guy getting tough. Now!" The three boys who, with Gordon, had elevated their arms and remained motionless ever since the bandit had first declared himself, looked in their friend's direction. Gordon was half smiling and as T., D. and H. met his eyes he turned his head and looked straight at Slick Williams.

"Everyone will be required to place all their valuables on their laps . . ." the bandit was saying. Then he stopped and his mouth gaped as he looked into Gordon's eyes. "Say," he managed to get out. "I've seen you before. Who—who are you?"

"The fellow you killed in 'seventy-eight," came Gordon's reply. "You plugged me clean between the eyes."

Slick Williams made a desperate attempt to recover from the shock of seeing someone he had, indeed, plugged two or three years before. Tom, Dick and Harry, fascinated by the man's look of terror, saw the fingers of the right hand tighten on the butt of a ·45.

"Better not," warned Gordon. "Y'r not quite a fool, Slick."

The man hesitated—hesitated and was utterly lost. He of the booming voice looked up from the act of bandaging a bleeding hand and drew with his left.

Crash!

Slick Williams went down in a heap between the seats and was still.

"Stay where you are!" shrilled Gordon. "There's a guy like that fellow in every car of the train. Leave this to me and my friends. Come on, boys!" Now the agile Gordon was leaping like an antelope down the length of the car and, with Tom, Dick and Harry at his heels, gained the entrance in a matter of seconds, before, in fact, the body of Slick Williams had ceased to twitch.

Looking right and left, Gordon gave a stream of swift orders.

"On the roof, chaps," he hissed. "Keep well down. Don't shoot until I give the word."

Tom, Dick and Harry, fear melting in the heat of the excitement, obeyed without question. They'd got used to doing that where Gordon Gregory was concerned and, as a rule, their obedience meant that one or more crooks who had defaced the golden West met their just deserts. In double-quick time they had gained the roof of No. 3 car and lay flat on their tummies waiting for Gordon to indicate the next move. By craning forward Dick Barrington could see a group of horses ground-hitched in a small copse by the side of the track; there was a single man close to them, and the afternoon sun caught and reflected the barrel of a six-gun.

"They're not likely to look upwards," whispered Gordon, as all four huddled together. "They're going systematically through the train and it's a cinch there's one of them taking care of the engineer and fireman. Loco Larson doesn't kill unless he has to; they say that he's busted more gun-wrists than any man in the West and I'm

prepared to believe it. Slick Williams was different. He got what he deserved, so you needn't worry about him."

"What's your plan?" broke in Dick.

"It's this. We've got to reach those horses and drive 'em off. I want to cut off these fellows' line of retreat. Savvy?"

The others nodded. "But how can we get to the horses?" put in Tom, and he could be forgiven if his voice shook just a little.

"Drive there!" came the almost laughing reply. "Listen. We'll crawl along the roofs of the cars to the locomotive, drop down and hold up the men who are taking care of the engineer and his assistant. Then we'll get Jake to move forward until we're level with that copse. It's only a matter of fifty yards beyond the loco and only fifteen yards from the track. We can make it in three leaps. Meantime, of course, the sudden start of the train will throw everyone into confusion and it's a cinch that the bandits will head straight for their ponies—and they'll do it shootin'. It's up to us to see that none of them find any ponies to get away on. Now, is that all quite clear?"

It wasn't, by any means, but Tom, Dick and Harry were not going to say so. They nodded.

"O.K." Briskly from Gordon. "Let's go."

It was a ticklish business wriggling along the roofs of those cars and the boys fully expected a shower of bullets at any moment. But none came. As Gordon had said, the bandits were too durned busy rifling that train and it wouldn't occur to them to look upwards for any enemies. The only danger lay in the fact that one of the bandits, wondering what had happened to Slick Williams, might enter car No. 3.

At last four heads peered downwards as the locomotive was reached.

"They'll get you for this!" came the voice of Jake the engineer.

"You talk too much!" growled a voice.

"Now!" hissed Gordon, and all four literally dived into the cab of the loco.

To say that the men holding up Jake and his colleague were surprised would be putting it very mildly indeed. It is safe to say that it wasn't for a long time that they knew exactly what did hit them. One plunged backwards from a heavy push by Dick's boot against his stomach, and the other went out like a candle as Jake seized a shovel and tapped him over the head.

"Send her forward, Jake!" bawled Gordon. *"Now!"*

There was an ear-splitting hiss of steam, a terrific jolt and the train moved forward. Then T., D. and H., with Gordon behind this time, were leaping from the footplate and racing, in a series of kangaroo leaps, for that little copse and for the waiting ponies.

It was Tom Hall who got the sentry with a beautiful shot through the calf of the leg, the safest kind of shot to ground a man, and then knives were at work slashing at the ground-hitching of the ponies.

"Grab a pony, boys!" yelled Gordon. "They'll take us out of trouble."

Unhesitatingly the boys obeyed and, to their surprise, found themselves in the saddle again when they had thought that, for the present at least, their riding through the Wild West was over. Bullets whined over their heads, but there was little danger, and in three minutes Gordon reined in his mount and they all looked back.

Shooting was going on near the train, but it soon ceased and then came a furious jangling of the locomotive bell.

"O.K., chaps," said Gordon, "let's get back. I guess some of the passengers will be wanting to see us."

That was an understatement of fact. When the quartet appeared, to find every one of the bandits, with the single exception of Slick Williams, securely tied up, they were greeted by a milling crowd of excited, grateful passengers.

"Gee!" boomed the man with the loud voice from car No. 3. "You fellows sure have nerve!"

"*You* weren't exactly scared, Mister!" remarked Gordon admiringly. "How's the wrist?"

"Only a flesh wound, I guess!" boomed the other.

Then followed a good deal of excitement, some drinking from flasks, back-slapping, hot coffee served by the perspiring negro porters, a grateful Jake wringing Gordon's hand and telling him at the same time that Loco Larson had escaped from that Colorado jail only four days before, and a trainman, white of face, telling Tom, Dick and Harry how there had been eight boxes of small gold bars in the baggage-car and how their heroism had not only saved the gold but saved him losing his job.

In the end, however, the engineer clanged his bell and the excited passengers sorted themselves out and reboarded the train. With the bandits, quite a small army of them, locked up in one of the cars that had been cleared of all other passengers, and under a guard of irate cattlemen, miners and ranchers travelling East on vacation, the train moved off and soon, gaining speed, set about making up as much time as possible.

In No. 4 car this time Gordon looked at his friends. "I think that is the last excitement this trip," he said. "I hope you enjoyed it. The whole trip, I mean!" he added.

"Enjoyed it?" echoed Tom. "It was—was——" He sought for the right word.

"Swell!" put in Dick, who was hardly ever lost for a word.

"I'm glad," came the reply. "This was something of an unexpected trip, I know, but later maybe I can fix up something just as good. That O.K. by you?"

The expressions on the boys' faces gave Gordon his answer.

"By the way," said Dick suddenly, "don't we have to change a couple of places for New York?"

Gordon Gregory shook his head. "No!" he answered. "You go straight through."

"But look here," protested Harry Dalby, "that can't be right, Gordon, because . . ."

Tom Hall touched the speaker's arm. "It's no good," he whispered, "he's asleep."

It was a fact. Gordon Gregory, his features like those of a waxwork figure, lay back in his seat and both eyes were closed.

"Maybe we'd better do the same," suggested Dick. "I'm dog tired." And he yawned heavily to show just how tired he was.

Soon all four were sleeping.

. . . .

Tom Hall was the first to awake, just as the train plunged into a tunnel.

"Wassermarrer?" he mumbled. "Where are we?"

"In a tunnel," came Harry's voice. "I'm beginning to wish we were back in a modern trans-continental flyer. Is Gordon awake?"

Harry peered into the darkness. "Can't see him!" he said. "He——"

Whaaaaaaaa!

The express came out of the tunnel in a rush of sound and, of a sudden, the light was blinding. The car was brilliantly lighted from end to end. They were back again in the present!

"You gen'leman ready for a tenderloin steak?"

Rubbing their eyes, Tom, Dick and Harry looked up into the grinning black face of a negro porter in a clean white coat and with a dazzling row of white teeth.

"You-all sleepin' so nicely I thought maybe you'd like to finish youse snooze."

The porter presented a menu card with a flourish. "What you-all havin' for supper?"

Dick was the first to speak.

"You do the choosing," he said with a grin. "We're from across the Atlantic and we're not used to the kind of food they serve in the States."

"Yessir!" cried the beaming man. "Right away, sir!" And he bustled off.

Tom Hall grinned at his two friends. "So that's why Gordon said there would be no change for New York," he remarked. "Gee!" he added. "I reckon that was the best trip of all, don't you?"

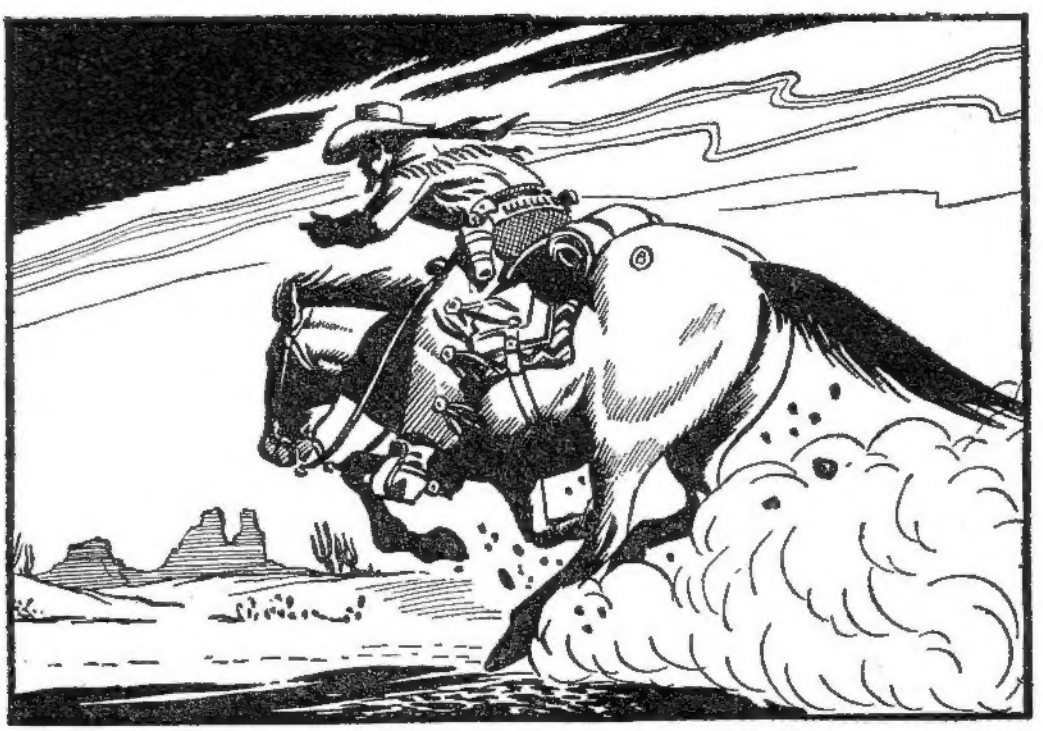
"It sure was!" agreed Dick and Harry in chorus.

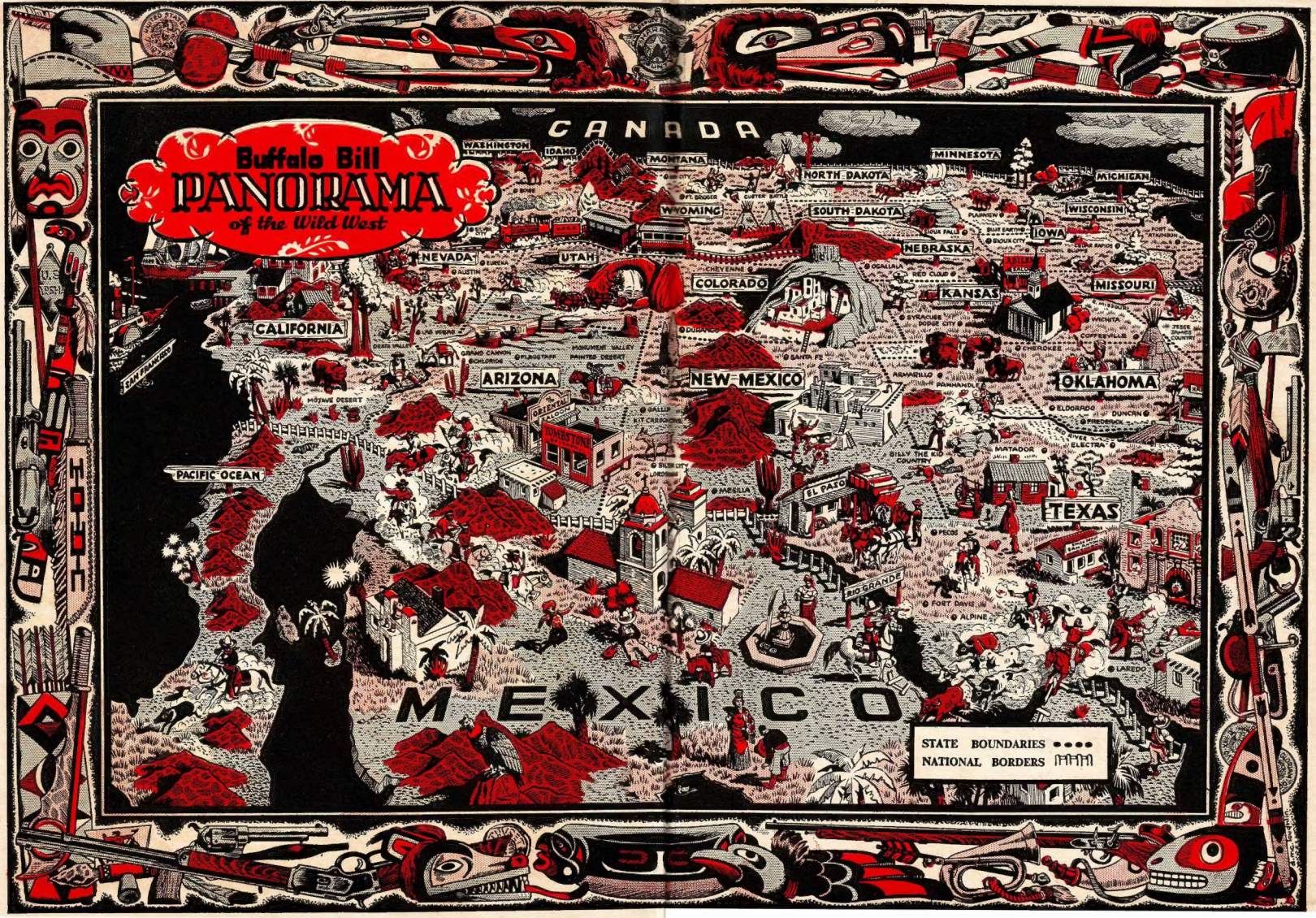
So, as the train tore through the early part of that night, three thrilled fellows from Colden College went over again and again in their memories the exciting times they had had with their tried and true friend Gordon Gregory.

"Whoooo—whoooo!"

The siren of the streamlined locomotive five cars ahead screamed its message but Tom, Dick and Harry did not hear that modern sound. Instead, in their ears rang another cry, the cry of the night-prowling coyote: *Yip-yip-yeow-w-w!*

THE END




Buffalo Bill
PANORAMA
of the Wild West
CANADA
WASHINGTON
IDAHO
MONTANA
NORTH DAKOTA
MINNESOTA
MICHIGAN
WYOMING
SOUTH DAKOTA
WISCONSIN
IOWA
NEBRASKA
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Seek! Locate! Preserve!

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